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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

Holier than Thou I

The mind cannot easily be conquered. Minds that rise into waves at the approach of every little thing at the slightest provocation or danger, in what a state they must be! What to talk of greatness or spirituality, when these changes come over the mind? This unstable condition of the mind must be changed. We must ask ourselves how far we can be acted upon by the external world, and how far we can stand on our own feet, in spite of all the forces outside us. When we have succeeded in preventing all the forces in the world from throwing us off our balance, then alone we have attained to freedom, and not before. That is salvation. It is here and nowhere else; it is this moment. Out of this idea, out of this fountainhead, all beautiful streams of thought have flowed upon the world, generally misunderstood in their expression, apparently contradicting each other. We find hosts of brave and wonderfully spiritual souls, in every nation, taking to caves or forests for meditation, severing their connection with the external world. This is the one idea. And, on the other hand, we find bright illustrious beings coming into society, trying to raise their fellow men, the poor, the miserable. Apparently these two methods are contradictory. The man who lives in a cave, apart from his fellow-beings, smiles contemptuously upon those who are working for the regeneration of their fellow men. "How foolish! What work is there? The world of Maya will always remain



the world of Maya; it cannot be changed." If I ask one of our priests in India, "Do you believe in Vedanta?"—he says, "That is my religion.; I certainly do; that is my life." "Very well, do you admit the equality of all life, the sameness of everything?" "Certainly, I do." The next moment, when a low-caste man approaches this priest, he jumps to one side of the street to avoid that man. "Why do you jump?" "Because his very touch would have polluted me." "But you were just saying we are all the same, and you admit there is no difference in souls." He says, "Oh, that is in theory only for householders; when I go into a forest, then I will look upon everyone as the same." You ask one of your great men in England, if he believes as a Christian in the brotherhood of mankind, he answers in the affirmative but in five minutes he shouts something uncomplimentary about the common herd. Thus, it has been a theory only for several thousand years, and never came into practice. All understand it, declare it as the truth, but when you ask them to practice it, they say, it will take millions of years.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 1.416-17.



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उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

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मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

एष हि खल्वात्मेशानः शम्भुर्भवो रुद्रः प्रजापतिर्विश्वसृक् हिरण्यगर्भः सत्यं प्राणो हंसः शास्ता
विष्णुर्नारायणोऽर्कः सविता धाता विधाता सम्राडिन्द्र इन्दुरिति । य एष तपत्यग्निरिवाग्निना पिहितः
सहस्राक्षेण हिरण्मयेनाण्डेन । एष वा जिज्ञासितव्योऽन्वेष्टव्यः सर्वभूतेभ्योऽभयं दत्वारण्यं गत्वाथ
बहिःकृत्वेन्द्रियार्थान् स्वाञ्जरीरादुपलभेतैनमिति । विश्वरूपं हरिणं जातवेदसं परायणं ज्योतिरेकं
तपन्तं । सहस्ररश्मिः शतधा वर्तमानः प्राणः प्रजानामुदयत्येष सूर्यः ।

॥६.८॥

*Esha hi khalv-atmesha nah shambhur-bhavo rudrah prajapatir-vishvasrik hiranyagarbhah
satyam prano hamsah shasta vishnur-narayano'rkah savita dhata vidhata samradindra
induriti. Ya esha tapaty-agfir-ivagnina pihitah sahasrakshena hiranmayenandena. Esha va
jijnasitavyo'nveshtavyah sarva-bhutebhyo'bhayam datvaranyam gatvatha bahihkritvendriyarthan
svansharirad-upalabhet-ainamiti. Vishvarupam harinam jatavedasam parayanam jyotir-ekam
tapantam. Sahasra-rashmih shatadha vartamanah pranah prajanam-udayat-yesha suryah. (6.8)*

This self is indeed the lord, the beneficent, the real, the terrible, the lord of creation, the creator of all, the golden womb, truth, vital breath, spirit, the ordainer, the pervader, Narayana, the shining, vivifier, the sustainer, the maker, the sovereign, Indra, and the moon. It gives heat, concealed by the thousand-eyed golden egg as one fire by another. It, indeed, one should desire to know, should be sought after. Having given fearlessness to all beings, having gone to the forest, then having given up sense-objects, let one attain the self out of one's own body. One who has all forms, the golden one, the all-knowing, the final goal, the only light, one who gives heat, the thousand-rayed, dwelling in a hundred places, the vital breath of beings, this sun rises. (6.8)

THIS MONTH

SELF-CENTREDNESS is a huge problem of the present age and this has made the individual focus on oneself all the time. This is also seen in how one is unable to engage with the audience or the listener in an unbiased manner. This problem is discussed in **Becoming One with the Audience**.

The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission has now the sixteenth president in the **New President of the Ramakrishna Order Sri-mat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj**.

In **The World Seen As the Field of Destiny** Alan Jacobs, President, Ramana Maharshi Foundation, United Kingdom advises us to accept that everything that happens from the galaxy to the atom does not move without the permission of the divine will.

Siddhartha Sen, Emeritus Fellow, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, shares his **Reflections on Vedanta and Science**. He stresses that the spiritual elements of science, such as its goals to understand and uncover what is true, its faith in rationality and observation, and its value system of truthfulness and integrity are understood and appreciated by society. This will allow society to properly scrutinise scientific projects and prevent the misuse of science by vested interests. Without such an understanding of the dharma of science, society could end up rejecting the rationality of science and its values of truth and replace them by an irrational pseudoscience driven by lies, superstition, greed, and power where truth is the victim. Thus it is important for society to understand with clarity what constitutes science.

Swami Saradeshananda was an illumined beacon among the disciples of Sri Sarada Devi. His spiritual wisdom and insight have inspired the lives of countless spiritual aspirants. Swami Shuklatmananda, a monk at Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Haridwar, served Swami Saradeshananda for ten years from 1978 to 1988 in Vrindavan. He shares with the readers his precious and blissful experiences in the holy company of Swami Saradeshananda in the fifth instalment of **Gems of Memories: Reminiscences of Swami Saradeshananda**.

Swami Sandarshanananda, a monk at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, Kolkata, in the ninth instalment of **Saga of Epic Proportions**, shows how Sister Nivedita supported Dr Jagadish Chandra Bose.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Manana**. Understanding this word is necessary to understand this process, which is the important second step of spiritual life.

We should not crave glory and honour as they are bound to be followed by danger as shown in the story **The Garland Honour**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*.

Vasanthi Srinivasan, Professor of Political Science, University of Hyderabad, has written the book **Hindu Spirituality and Virtue Politics**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

Becoming One with the Audience

ARE YOU LISTENING? When is the last time you listened to someone, without thinking any thoughts about, for, or against, what was being told to you? When is the last time you listened to someone without starting to frame your reply in your mind? When is the last time you listened to someone without forming a bias? Even as you are reading these words, almost all of you readers, are trying to do one of the things that have been mentioned here. And that is the problem of a severe epidemic of individualisation that has struck us today.

Can someone create something without any thought at all about the person for whom that thing is being created? Can a singer sing something without thinking of the listeners? This question can be asked about almost any creator, creative or otherwise. Remember the time when you struggled to use a product, which became so user-unfriendly because of a bad and botched-up product design? A pen that constantly slips your grip, a drilling machine that continuously shakes out of control, and a driver's seat that is too close to the steering wheel, are all signs of the creator failing to listen to or become one with the audience.

Swami Vivekananda famously said that we need to concentrate on the whys of life rather than bother about the hows. And that is what we would do here too. We would try to find why is it that one fails to connect with the audience, or become the audience. Great filmmakers have always wanted to completely identify themselves with the audience, because they

knew that was the only way to produce great and memorable films. In film or theatre, it is a big challenge to overgrow acting and direct-

Becoming one with the audience ensures that we are performing well.

ing, and watching one's own creation from a distance, as an observer, as an audience. This process involves shedding the ego and identification as the creator. To understand why this identification comes in the first place, we have to understand how speech was used by the primitive human being. For the human being or for most living beings, which can generate some sound, sound has been a major dominance mechanism. For instance, a bird that hops from one tree-top to the other and chirps at its maximum sound is not trying to convey any fabulous idea, but is just establishing its dominance in the area.

Fear of death and the fear of killing were eventually replaced by the human beings by the fear of dominance by being shouted out. Even today, there are many tribes, which make deafening noise before any conflict, just to frighten the other group. Gradually, mere sound or volume was replaced by the content of speech for acquiring dominance. So, intelligent speech with much rhetoric and citing of evidence to support one's standpoint is what has become the modern means of achieving dominance. So, when you are framing your reply even while you are listening to someone, you are actually yielding

to a defence mechanism that has been built in you, and that you have inherited from your millennia-old ancestors. This is a vestigial remnant of evolution. We have to overcome it by understanding that there are no more the same kind of opponents as in our primitive times. Most of the time, there are no opponents.

It is necessary to become one with the audience also because that improves one's performance. Else, lost in one's pride, a person loses all sense of performance, speaking or otherwise. Oftentimes, one has to just listen to one's own words to understand the absurdity of one's speech. And yet, it is surprising how many people do not bother about what they are speaking! That is why we should strive to become one with the audience.

The problem of getting dissociated from the audience comes primarily because we posit an 'other' and keep it always separate from us. If we proceed from an understanding and conviction of the oneness of all universe, then we would not feel that we are separate from the audience and so, our performance would be the most suited to the audience, in essence, ourselves. This subjectification of the all apparent objectivity is necessary to bring the much needed sanity in our lives.

Much of losing oneself in pride trying to win a performance by impressing the audience, also in an argument, is due to a hardwired brain activity. When one is deep into an argument, one is naturally stressed, and in times of stress, the more evolved parts of the brain shut down and the primitive brain or the amygdala takes over and starts operating. Unfortunately, this primitive brain does not understand anything other than winning or losing, and so one tries to win the situation by concentrating only on the other, to the extent of even forgetting how the performance or response is being delivered. This proves to be counterproductive

most of the time and the audience is anything but pleased.

Becoming one with the audience is the best way to ensure that we are performing well and that we have the attention of our audience. All performance is a two-way experience. It should become a transformation. Life should change, our world view affected, and our ideas influenced every time we have a conversation. That is why it is called a 'conversation'. It requires an interaction. Same is the case with every performance. A person watching a movie or a drama should get influenced, if that person has watched the performance properly that is. Thus, performance becomes an event that is witnessed in the same manner by both the performer and the audience. There is no more the duality of the seer and the seen. The seer and the seen are merged into one seer, who is seeing the performance as an unbiased entity. And thus, the performance itself turns into a tremendous transformative power. This drastic change in the conventional manner in which performance is perceived is called metacommunicative performative competence in critical discourses on performance and performativity. So, all values of philosophy, religion, culture, language, and other such departments of the human sciences have no longer to be understood as discrete units of concepts, texts, or signs, but could be seen as different kinds of performance.

This universe and our performance on this world theatre, to paraphrase Shakespeare, ought to produce a strong impression on us and we ought to be impelled to strive to be free from suffering that this universe gives us. It is only our ignorance that befools us into thinking that it is only a one-way transaction and makes us get stuck in the incessantly moving wheel of transmigration, making us take repeated births and deaths.



The World Seen As the Field of Destiny

Alan Jacobs

IN THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER of the Bhagavadgita, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna: ‘And, O scion of the Bharata dynasty, understand me to be the “knower of the field” in all the fields. In my opinion, that is knowledge which is the knowledge of the field and the knower of the field.’¹

Kshetra means ‘field’ and is usually translated by different commentators as meaning either the field of the body, the field of the world, or both; probably because from the highest perspective, as we shall see, the world is often compared to a dreamlike projection of the body and mind.

For the purpose of this essay, however, I wish to explore *kshetra* as the field of the world.

There is undoubtedly a great deal of misery and anxiety occupying peoples’ minds these days about the suffering currently undergone on the planet through barbaric terrorism, local armed conflicts, starvation, disease, and economic depression. Many atheists and agnostics base their scepticism about the existence of an almighty God of love on the observation that a benign and benevolent God of love could not possibly exist, or else he would not permit so much world suffering.

According to sages, the highest teaching of the world’s higher religions, in their mystical branches, is contained in the idea that all is ‘One’ and that we all come from the same divine source to which many names can be given. Ramana Maharishi used to say that God is the actual form of love. So why then is there so much suffering in the world? To answer this question,

we must first understand that this apparent plane of existence is better seen as a vast field of karma in which a great plan for human evolution is embedded.

As different sages often point out, men and women are born in this planet with their karma, for their own spiritual development. This was stated emphatically to Paul Brunton by Ramana Maharishi and is fully recorded in the book *Conscious Immortality*: ‘Individual human beings have to suffer their karmas for His purpose. God manipulates the fruits of karma; He does not add or take away it. The subconsciousness of man is a warehouse of good and bad karma. Iswara chooses from this warehouse what He sees will best suit the spiritual evolution at the time of each man whether pleasant or painful. Thus there is nothing arbitrary.’²

In addition, nobody actually dies in reality. Sri Krishna told this to Arjuna and asked him not to grieve. The jiva is reborn into a new life, again chosen from one’s *vasanas* or subconscious latent tendencies, accumulated in previous lives, for one’s spiritual growth. This cycle continues until as a result of meritorious deeds they are, then through grace, eventually brought to the great Advaita Vedanta teachings of Acharya Shankara, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharishi, and other great sages, which in due course would lead them to self-realisation. Then the whole karmic scheme of subtle body transmigration collapses and the nature of Brahman seen as a God of love is fully realised.

Briefly summarised, Ramana Maharishi states that from a higher perspective the question concerning the triad of world, God, and the individual should be seen as inventions of the mind. From a lower perspective, instead of worrying about the world, we should allow the one who created it to look after it.

If this is accepted then the suffering which people endure are benign in the sense that this is their karma for their soul's spiritual development. Ramana Maharishi also once said that all suffering leads to God-realisation. Nobility of soul and very many virtues are only born out of suffering. This *samsara* which is a time of purgation and purification uses suffering to bring its children back to true values rather than linger in the hedonism of a decadent and corrupt culture.

As the great mystical poet Hafiz wrote: 'Never the greatest man that yet was born, Has plucked a rose so soft it has no thorn.'³

We live in a world based on the law of polar opposites, which we have to surmount. There has always been suffering on the planet. The suffering endured in the two great world wars makes contemporary suffering almost infinitesimal in comparison. At the same time we must never be hard-hearted and indifferent to any suffering, and should always act with compassion. As all sages teach, if suffering comes our way, we must do our utmost to relieve it. The *jnani* is all-compassionate, not only to human beings but to animals and plants as well. The greatest help we can bring to humanity is our own self-realisation that mitigates world suffering both amongst the believers and the faithless.

It is often asked: 'How do I deal with suffering when it happens?' Primarily one must 'accept' that whatever is, ultimately it is all for the best. The human mind cannot understand the higher wisdom. With this form of total unconditional

surrender, one gradually perceives the lesson that we were meant to learn from our suffering. Every day living is often full of stress, anxiety, loss, and disappointment. After the acceptance to which I have referred to, we must hand over the whole burden of our life to God or the guru in our heart as an act of total surrender. Then God or guru carries our whole burden, and all our cares become theirs.

As a poet I have written a poem which encapsulates my thesis, perhaps better than prose.

Mother Maya's Magic Motion Picture Show

Everything we find and feel and see,
Is but an illusory jamboree,
Mere fleeting pictures on awareness' screen,
Produced by Mother Maya as a scene
Which can best be likened to
night-time dreams,
What feels to be real is not what it seems.

Mother Maya serves Brahman the great,
She with Ishvara have their ordained fate,
To produce a film for each jiva born,
From hidden tendencies fair and forlorn.

The aim of this phantasmagoria,
Is blessed salvation for each jiva.
Therein's the death of ignorances' story.
They'll restore each soul to rightful glory,

So it shall grow in spiritual strength,
And awaken from this wan worldly wretch.
Brahman's the substratum and I am 'That',
Chit, ananda, pure conscious, existence, Sat.

As the great Tamil poet Sri Muruganar trenchantly put it in his long work *Guru Vachaka Kovai*:

The real bliss of mukti,
Cannot come unless the world's
Allurement disappears.
To try to thrust Reality

Into the world,
A mere appearance,
Is mere folly.
Like an infatuate lover,
Foisting chastity upon a prostitute.⁴

Ultimately we must accept that everything that happens from galaxy to atom does not move without the permission of the divine will. Who are we with our petty egotistic humanoid perception, based on personal pleasurable satisfaction, to question the actions of the master of the

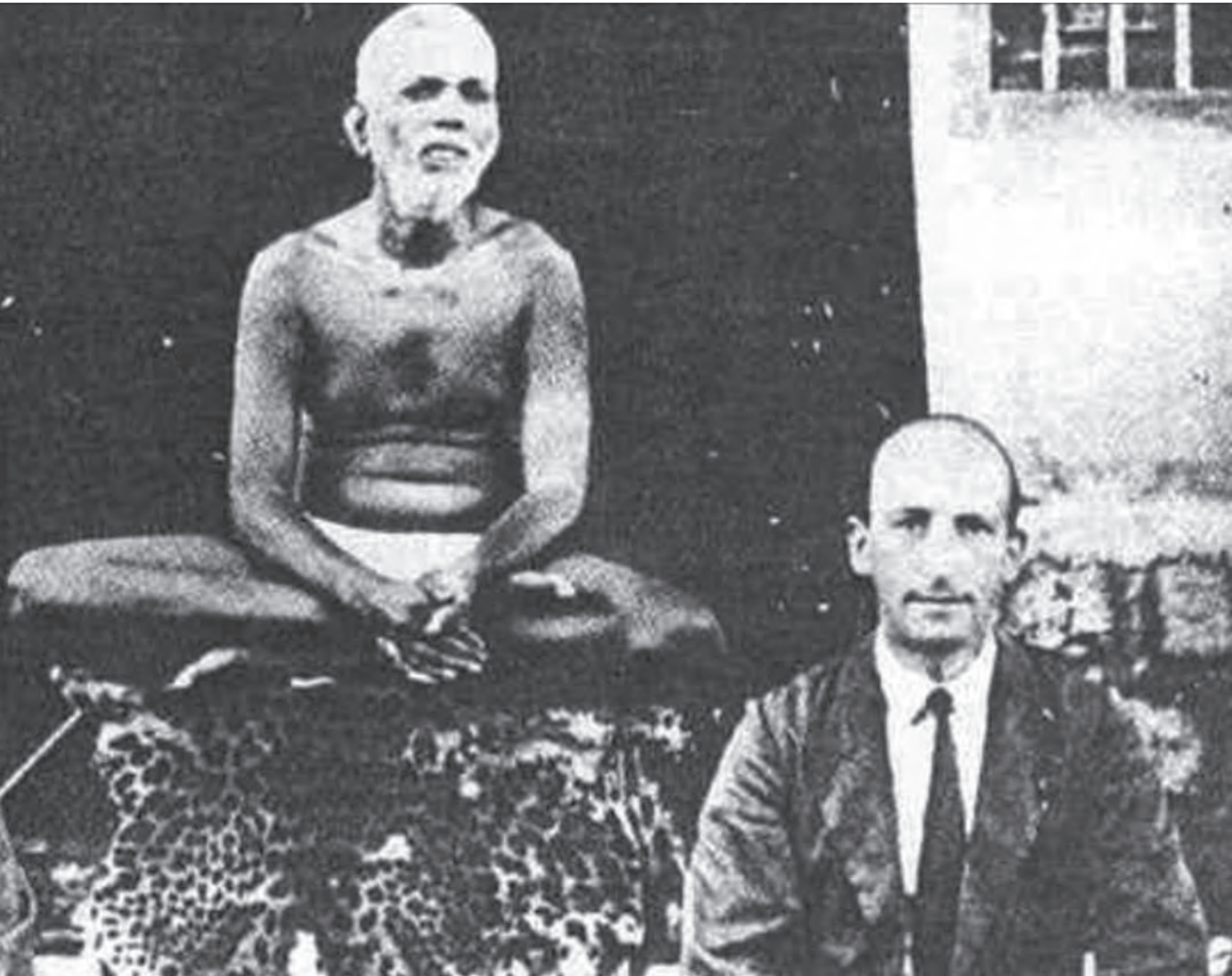
Universe, which are beyond our intelligence to even remotely fathom?

PB

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1. Gita, 13.1.
2. Paul Brunton and Munagala Venkataramiah, *Conscious Immortality: Conversations with Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Ramanasramam, 1984), 135.
3. Hafiz of Shiraz, *New Nightingale, New Rose*, trans. Richard Le Gallienne (Goffstown: Bardic, 2003), 34.
4. Sri Muruganar, *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, 74.

Paul Brunton (1898–1981) with Sri Ramana Maharshi



Reflections on Vedanta and Science

Siddhartha Sen

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK Swami Veetamo-hananda and the Védantique Ramakrishna, Gretz for giving me this opportunity to share with you my thoughts on Vedanta and science. These thoughts, presented in the form of a fictional narrative, tell the story of the human race's search to understand and know what is Real. I speak, not as an expert, but as a dilettante, which originally meant someone who takes delight in a topic or subject.

Prologue

Human beings, like all creatures on earth, followed the natural rhythms of life, cooperated with others of the species, defended one's territory, protected the offspring and taught them how to face the challenges of life. These features, common to all living creatures, were not enough for the human being. For the human being, there was an irresistible artistic-poetic urge to capture and record life's experiences, an urge to celebrate important events of life as a community and an intellectual urge to understand the world. The intellectual urge made the human being want to explain the multitude of life's experiences in terms of a smaller number of fundamental elements. This understanding was then presented in a way that appealed to all members of the society. The artistic-poetic urge led the human being to poetry, paintings, music, theatre, and dance. The urge to celebrate or respond as a community to important events of life such as weddings, harvesting, births, and deaths led to the creation of festivals and rituals that brought the community

together. These urges are present in all human beings but great innovations and contributions to them came from the visionaries, the dreamers, and the music makers of the community. These urges are not required for survival but they all have one thing in common: they give joy.

Thus the urge to understand the changing pattern of seasons, the uncertain events of life and death led to the grand hypothesis that all human events were controlled by gods who were themselves driven by human-like urges. This grand vision was then presented and celebrated in the form of exciting stories, paintings, and dance. These became the myths and legends of the community that harmoniously blended the intellectual, the artistic urges, and the societal urges of man. It would seem that any stable coherent structure needs to satisfy these three basic urges of man.

As the myths described the power of the gods to control human events, it made sense to please the gods and appeal to them for help. If this could be done then perhaps life's uncertainties could be controlled with the help of divine intervention. This comforting possibility required the presence of able go-betweens who could communicate with the gods. These go-betweens became the priests and were important figures of society. Gods were venerated by the building of temples in which communal rituals and worship were done in a transparent and public way. The temples and priests started to play an important role in community events by sanctifying them with the blessings of the gods. Such community

events gave society a common identity and stability. An unexpected consequence of these developments was that many found in the rituals of worship fulfilment of an inner urge to contemplate and reach out to something beyond themselves and their day-to-day concerns.

Myths and legends also provided a society with a shared vision of what was true, what was good, what was evil, what right conduct was, and how life should be lived. The process of striving for understanding thus had important consequences. A society with a successful coherent vision of what was true was stable. The vision defined the civilisation and its aspirations. A stable coherent vision needed to satisfy the artistic, the societal, and the intellectual urges of humanity.

The basic underlying belief that the laws of nature and the events of human life were under the control of Gods led to two responses. The first conservative response was to discover more efficient ways to influence the gods, while the second radical response, was to wonder if life's events could be influenced directly by human beings without the involvement of gods. Those who followed the first path turned to priests for help and encouraged them to train others and also urged them to improve the links of communication between the human being and God by prayer and by devising, for example, special rituals. While those who followed the second approach turned to another new member of society that had emerged: the magician. The magician did experiments to find out how events could be controlled. This involved trying to understand the essence of natural phenomenon so that they could be controlled. The magicians of old are the scientists of modern times.

The Quest

The ancient quest of the human race to understand has continued without pause from the

earliest times to the present. But the nature of the myths that are now told have changed. The new myths explain the workings of nature in a different way using abstract symbols and rational arguments. No gods are needed. The old myths and legends, which were tacitly accepted, appealed both to the head and the heart of the members of society. They had a poetic-artistic and a societal part. The old myths explained not just the working of nature but also human being's place in the universe and provided guidance on the way life should be lived. The new myths are amazingly intricate and they beautifully explain the working of nature. But the manner of presenting these understandings of nature no longer have an explicit artistic-poetic or societal component in them. They are aimed solely at the intellect of man. Neither do the new myths address common concerns regarding the human being's place in the universe or what is right conduct. A fragmentation of knowledge into super specialised areas has occurred.

We are living in the midst of this revolution. The old certainties, the old myths, and legends explaining the human being's place in the universe, have, for many, lost their validity as they often contradict robust and stunning insights that have been established about the working of nature. At the same time the new forms of understanding have yet to provide answers to pressing problems of the human situation in a way that appeals to all. An artistic-poetic description accessible to all or a societal component that allows all to celebrate new insights discovered is missing.

This is the advent of the modern scientific age. It has as its faith the belief that the world of our experiences can be understood by rational means and with the help of precise measurements. It proclaims that all interested can enter its temples, all can follow and understand the rituals of

science and all are free to confirm the truth of the scriptures of science using their power of reasoning and by carrying out experiments. What is required is to have faith in the power of the intellect and to acknowledge the primacy of observations. In this religion one expects setbacks but one also believes that dedicated work will lead to the promised land of understanding ourselves and the universe. The doctrine of science also proclaims that there is no certainty. The quest for understanding and searching for the true and real is always provisional. This great human endeavour has spread throughout the world. It is a liberating element for the human spirit. It seems to be the new religion of the world. However science does not satisfy, as yet, the artistic or the societal urges of man necessary for their acceptance by all. The joy of doing or understanding science is not accessible to all.

The Problem

But not all can join the adventure of science. Science too has its own priests who know the right things to do in order to harness the powers of nature. However the methods used by them are not secret. All interested can learn the methods. But for many these methods of science are too remote and disconnected from normal life to be of interest. There is a disconnect between the interests of the vast majority of society and those of the scientist. The religion of science seems to have no room for the human spirit or for important human values such as love, compassion, friendship, or loyalty. It seems aggressively confrontational, challenging earlier coherent stable systems of myths and legends and values that provided a framework for living life and offered solace at times of distress. Neither is it possible for those who do not understand the language of the discourse to truly rejoice at the new insights that science uncovers. Only a limited number

of science-priests can share in the joy of new insights and greater understandings. Science has thus become the territory of high priests of the intellect where others, who are guided by their heart and feelings and values, feel they are not welcome. Even the high priests cannot follow all the scientific discourses as different high priests use different languages. The number of distinct languages grows relentless and there is no high priest who can understand all the languages. Science is seen as a highly specialised activity devoid of human elements. For being at peace with one's self a balance between our rational, emotional, and spiritual elements is required. The current disconnect has given rise to discord, alienation, and suspicion.

It is also important that the spiritual elements of science, such as its goals to understand and uncover what is true, its faith in rationality and observation, and its value system of truthfulness and integrity are understood and appreciated by society. This will allow society to properly scrutinise scientific projects and prevent the misuse of science by vested interests. Without such an understanding of the dharma of science, society could end up rejecting the rationality of science and its values of truth and replace them by an irrational pseudoscience driven by lies, superstition, greed, and power where truth is the victim. Thus it is important for society to understand with clarity what constitutes science.

The need for such clarity became a practical matter in the US when a certain state of the country successfully argued at the Supreme Court and won their contention that the teaching of creationism should be done in schools as part of science. A group of US scientists including seventy-two Nobel prize winners, seventeen state academies, seven other scientific organisations led by the physicist Murray Gellmann, felt that this was wrong and the matter reached the

Supreme court again as *amicus curiae*. The scientists won their case. It hinged on the definition of science.

The Definition of Science

Science is a rational way to find out what is true and real. It rests on the twin pillars of intellectual scrutiny and repeated validation from precise imaginative measurements. Its essential feature is its tentative, provisional nature. Science has no certainties. Any scientific hypothesis proposed should also have the property that it could be disproved either by rational arguments or by experiments. It should be falsifiable. However the basic quest of science is to discover the nature of reality that is present in natural phenomena.

It is these agreed features of science, articulated by the Nobel prize winners, that led the US Supreme Court to reject creationism as science. Creationism as presented to the US Court had certainty built into it and did not have an underlying experimental foundation, which could be checked. It was not falsifiable.

As better methods of measuring, better methods of calculating, better methods of sharing knowledge were developed, the human race moved rapidly forward in its quest to know and to understand. Progress seemed to be unstoppable. The world observed was revealed to have structures that were simple and elegant but required the abandonment of many ideas, which previously had seemed to be obviously true. Matter was discovered to have structure, it was not solid but full of empty space, and its elements were glued together in a way that required modifications to our simple ideas of space and time. The world was found to be a place where there is flux and change everywhere. The clockwork certainties of the Newtonian world were replaced by the world of probabilities of the quantum world.



Murray Gellmann (b. 1929)

These new insights about the world were painfully forged in the fire of rationality and abstraction and by precise, imaginative experimentation. The insights suggested were constantly subjected to experimental scrutiny. As this relentless move of understanding progressed, it became clear that the idea of what is Real was undergoing a metamorphosis. Matter and energy originally introduced as powerful, unifying, but distinct concepts that identified unchanging elements in a changing world were shown, by Einstein, to be no longer distinct but interchangeable. Space and time were no longer spectators, as suggested by Newton and Kant, but were part of the drama of the world of physics. Indeed, it was suggested that the very notion of space and time and causality were absent in an earlier epoch. It was also found that for complex biological systems the very idea of what was a cause and what was an effect was problematic. Underpinning all of these bewildering changes of perspective there remained the unchanging laws of nature discovered, and the unchanging world of structures described by the world of mathematics.

Human beings seemed to be able to access this abstract unchanging world of mathematics,

in a mysterious way, explore its landscape, and return joyfully with insights that miraculously were rejected in the world, revealed by experiments. These experiments depended on human inventiveness and ingenuity. For example, instruments for measuring were and are being devised that can magnify our senses a billion times to peer inside the atom and gather data from the far ends of the universe. To analyse experimental results new ways of storing and sorting information as well as fast new ways of calculating were devised. With these theoretical and experimental aids the discovery of new phenomena and the uncovering of major new areas for exploration have accelerated. These are exciting times.

But these great achievements still did not face up to the challenge of who sees, who measures, and who creates. At a practical level, the answer is obvious. All human beings see, measure, and create. But there is a mystery lurking.

Mysteries

Let us understand the mystery. The world of physics and science can follow each step that occurs when our eyes receive light, it can follow the processes of electrical and chemical impulses that then happen in our brain, and can even pinpoint the cooperative way in which different parts of the brain react to a given input. However at the end of these steps, we still will not know why we see or when two strangers meet and talk about what they see, hear, touch, smell, or taste whether their private experiences are the same or not. We seem to be doomed to never know as our experiences remain utterly private.

There are more mysteries. Science tells us that the cells of our body change, their constituents die, and are replaced. We are thus constantly changing material objects. But in order to agree

on common experiences we must have a reference point: we must be able to compare our present experiences with the ones we had before. As we are physically different every second of our lives so what is it that gives us the feeling of continuity of our experiences? What is it that makes us feel that there is an external world, which all of us experience and describe? After all everything we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell is the result of processes in our brain. The brain does not see, touch, taste, and smell but in its lonely enclosure inside your head it decides what we experience. It is indeed possible to stimulate the brain to get the experience of sight, smell, taste, and touch. Such studies reveal that these experiences are interdependent. If we cannot smell or see all colours, even the taste of food that we eat can change. Thus it is our brain that creates the world for us. However, the constituents of this brain are ever changing. Then, why are we convinced that I as a person am the same throughout these changes? Where does this unchanging 'I' or Self reside? Is the idea of the Self an emergent concept of the brain? Why is it insensitive to the changes of the brain? Why do we think that two strangers are seeing the same world? It could very well be the case that eventually these questions will be answered by science in its own terms. However, there is no universal agreement regarding the truth of current attempts made to answer these questions. They seem to be incomplete.

By following the progress of science as briefly sketched here, we thus seem to return to the central questions: What is Real, and how do we know it? We have sketched the steps that have led science to ask these questions. Perhaps we should turn to those who have pursued this question in the past. Perhaps we should turn to Advaita Vedanta to learn what the ancient sages had to say about these matters.

Vedanta

The poet Rabindranath Tagore in his delightful book *The Religion of Man* describes the human race's progression from a belief system that supposed that a powerful creator governed the world that needed to be appeased from time to time by blood sacrifices, representing food and other valuable items. This vision was derived from the experiences of life where those powerful needed to be appeased by such gifts of food and items of value. In this world there suddenly appeared a revolutionary doctrine, first articulated by Zarathustra, who proclaimed that the proper way to face the world was to be guided by three principles of good words, good thoughts, and good deeds. These were to be the new offerings to the gods. From then onwards a number of great teachers of humanity arrived such as Buddha, Confucius, Jesus Christ, and later Mohammed. These teachers offered visions that would help humanity face problems of old age, of anger, of injustice, of greed, of envy, lust, and of death. The careful study of the external world carried out in science did not address these problems at all. Neither did science have anything to say about beauty, joy, friendship, or compassion. Thus, science was not and could not provide answers to these important questions of humanity. There seemed to be a total disconnect between these human needs and the aims of science. A human being would like to reconcile the scientific way with the way of the heart. The way of the intellect does address the issues listed.

In my list of great teachers there was no name listed from the tradition of Hinduism. This is because defining Hinduism is difficult and because it has no known founder. There are different streams with different leaders who differ on many matters. There is no universally accepted list of books or doctrines that all Hindus accept. However, most would accept that the core element of Hinduism is that it is Sanatana Dharma,

Zarathustra



that is, it is not a religion but the discovery of the eternal laws of humanity by sages of the Vedic age. The laws do not proscribe. They simply tell us that the laws described are truths experienced which answer the question: what is Real? These eternal laws can be summarised in the form of a few statements:

1. Truth = Real = unchanging; outside; space; time; causality
2. Self = Real
3. Knowledge = knowing Reality = realisation
4. Consciousness = waking; dreaming; deep sleep; *turiya* = realisation
5. Many—paths—for—Realisation—exist

These extraordinary statements summarise Vedanta. They shift attention from the study of nature to the study of consciousness and of the Self. In doing this they also provide answers, as we will explain, for the mysteries posed. They offer a way forward for reconciling the study of the Real world as an object and of study of Reality as a personal experience.

Many of the great religions offer insights regarding the way life should be lived based on the teachings of a founder, who is a representative of God on earth or a teacher of great wisdom. If Vedanta is truly a statement of eternal truths it should not be in conflict with truths of any religion or the experimentally discovered truths of science. From this it follows that if a belief system or statement cannot withstand rational or experimental scrutiny Vedanta tells us that it should be discarded. It is not Real.

How do these statements of Vedanta help? How do they help us resolve the puzzles and mysteries we listed? These issues will be discussed while we answer the basic question: What is Vedanta?

The Vedanta and its Statements

Let us now turn to the question: What is Vedanta? The ideas of Vedanta are described in three canonical texts: the Bhagavadgita, the *Brahma Sutra*, and the Upanishads. The Gita in seven hundred verses discusses the essential ideas of Vedanta in the form of a conversation between the human being and god. The conversation takes place in a battlefield before the start of a battle for a kingdom between cousins. The Brahma Sutra has aphorisms that are threads of deep insights, which need to be studied with the help of an able guide or a commentary. Generally, the Upanishads are at the end of the Vedas and contain the essence of the Vedas. Each Upanishad has a name. There are over one hundred Upanishads, of which ten are very special as the famous Hindu mystic, saint, and philosopher Acharya Shankara wrote commentaries on them and also placed them in order. These ten Upanishads are: *Isa*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prashna*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Chhandogya*, and *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishads.

The Vedas are ancient hymns, which were orally transmitted with written versions appearing later. These hymns of creation and rituals evolved into a philosophical system, Vedanta, concerned with the nature of Reality. There are four Vedas: the Rig, the Yajur, the Sama, and the Atharva, placed in order of their age and their predominant interest in gods and myths of creation, rules for rituals, chants, or magic spells. The Vedas are, for many Hindus, the canonical texts of their faith. However, Vedanta quickly moves away from rituals and dismisses them as unsafe rafts for moving from ignorance to knowledge. Knowledge in Vedanta means realisation of an unchanging Reality. Thus Vedanta has two strands. The main strand is to report on the nature of Reality and there is a second strand, which illustrates this quest,

by using the ideas of nature accepted at that time. Thus, the different gods controlling the forces of nature, the god of death, the demons who are always trying to wrest control from the gods, the creator Prajapati all appear in the Upanishads as do specific statements about natural phenomena such as the origin of rain. The specific statements about natural events, taken literally, are factually contrary to modern day science. They and the references to gods and demons in stories represent the belief systems of that age. These stories also stress that true knowledge can be obtained from many sources. However, the spirit of Vedanta is not to explain natural phenomena or to talk about gods and demons but to use all means available to the human being to realise what is true. The intellect and reasoning have to be used; however, they have their limitations. The sages tell us that to experience Reality we have to go beyond the intellect and reasoning.

Thus, Vedanta accepts all results about the external world discovered by reasoning and by those obtained by the refinement of our senses using instruments. However, it reinterprets the external world, which is a space-time bound temporary creation, as having as its foundation a hidden unchanging timeless Reality. It then proclaims that our Self that allows us to see, to touch, to feel is the same unchanging and timeless Reality as well. Thus, Vedanta answers the mysteries and puzzles which we pointed out at the beginning regarding who sees, who feels, who thinks, and what makes the Self in the human being remain unchanging through all the physical changes of the brain and the body. Vedanta thus looks at the changing impermanent world but sees in it the presence of a timeless-unchanging Reality. It also tells us that we experience this Reality in deep sleep.

These insights are summarised crudely in

the statements we made about Vedanta. The statements are logically arranged. They summarise the experience of truth realised and achieved by the sages. It should be stressed that all acts of understanding are mysterious personal transformational experiences that cannot be described by words. They involve realisation. Vedanta is concerned with such transformational changes. In talking about Vedanta, we have only examined how its vision complements and supports the landscape of scientific reality. In doing this we are acutely aware that these matters are outside the realm of the intellect. What we have done is to try to glimpse the deep insights of Vedanta in the framework of the intellectual goals of science. We continue in this spirit and discuss the postulates stated about Vedanta.

The first postulate states that there is an unchanging Reality, the second postulate states that the Self of human beings is this Reality, which has no parts.

These two postulates have an intellectual, mathematical character. All this changes in the third statement, which informs us that the first two postulates made about Reality are not simply intellectual hypotheses but are truths that can be verified by a process of realisation. This lifts the subject from an intellectual exercise to one that is important for life.

The fourth statement tells us that every day we experience this unchanging reality when we are in a state of deep sleep. In this state we experience no differences, have no desires, but we do not properly understand the implications of this experience. We are told that there are four stages of consciousness. The first three are experienced by all, while the fourth is realisation. Thus, there is a hierarchy starting from the waking state, the dreaming state, the state of deep sleep, which can progress to the final state of realisation, where all

distinctions disappear and the knowledge of the unity of existence is experienced. This can happen only if the right ingredients of concentration, effort, and wish are present.

A proper discussion of these four stages is contained in the Upanishads and in the commentaries of Gaudapada, Acharya Shankara, and others. They are exciting accounts that point out how the three different states of consciousness experienced by all, namely the waking state, the state of dreaming, and the state of deep sleep, are telling us something profound about our nature and suggesting to us the existence of a fourth state: *turiya*, which is realisation.

Finally, the fifth statement tells us that there are many paths, all difficult, that can be followed to get realisation. These paths include the path of the intellect, the path of devotion, the path of selfless work, and the path of meditation. The greatest barrier to realisation is the ego. Thus a poet or artist or scientist can achieve realisation by carrying out her or his work seeking Truth appropriately.

We conclude our brief summary with a puzzle. Vedantic texts like the *Mundaka Upanishad* dismiss the usefulness of rituals of worship even though such rituals are deemed to be important in the Vedas. This is explained by saying that the rituals, the Vedas, astronomy, and the like, represent lower knowledge that is not helpful for self-realisation, which is higher knowledge. Still this is an unusual and puzzling situation since both texts are part of Hinduism. How can one understand this? Perhaps another slant to the answer given can be provided. This is to acknowledge the fact that human beings evolve and their needs and requirements change. The needs at one stage of development might be greatly helped by rituals but at a later stage, when the goals of life have changed, rituals might not be necessary or useful. Such a progressional

approach is a recurrent theme in Vedanta. Thus different answers, appropriate for different stages of development of a seeker of the Real, are given. From this perspective there is no puzzle or contradiction.

Let us finally gather together and expand on the different threads presented. In science, we stressed that our senses and our intellect are used to explore and measure the world. Such explorations have established that hidden in the changing world there are unchanging elements: the laws of nature, the structures of mathematics, and the presence of fundamental material entities. At one time these unchanging fundamental material entities were taken to be atoms, now they are taken to be quarks and leptons.

As science progressed more, wonders were revealed. At the conceptual level science underwent a revolution with the introduction of quantum theory. In this theory a permanent probabilistic framework for describing the world was introduced, which replaced an earlier deterministic view of physical reality. The theory also suggested a holistic view of the world. It suggested that an event at one end of the universe would have consequences at the other end. It suggested that the separation between the observer and what was being observed was not as clear-cut as it was in pre-quantum theory times.

At the experimental end there were wonders as well. Refined experiments suggested that the universe itself is evolving and that it had a beginning: the Big Bang. Such a picture was used by theorists to suggest the bold hypothesis that at an earlier epoch there was a single fundamental law governing the physical world and that at an even earlier epoch the very concept of space and time were not present. The single fundamental law hypothesis proposed, had the ability to explain why and how it changed into the currently known collection of laws as the universe

evolved. Although experimental confirmation of key elements of such unified theories is not available as yet but faith in the eventual success of the idea remains undiminished.

The scientific search to understand nature has thus led to the search for a hidden unity present at the fundamental level. On the way many surprising features of nature were discovered. For instance, in order to understand stars, which are large objects, it was found that one needed to understand the quantum laws valid inside the atom, it was found that exquisitely precise measurements could check predicted features for an expanding universe, and that unseen quantum vibrations, predicted on theoretical grounds, led to measurable forces. The world revealed by science, at the fundamental level, had become abstract. It was very different from the world that we see.

These scientific insights and the goal to find a unified theory for fundamental physics do not imply that scientists feel that all physical phenomena, from the microscopic to the macroscopic, can be explained from one universal law. On the contrary it has been established that in order to understand complex systems, emergent elements, which are system specific, and not present in the fundamental laws, are required. This view implies that a separation between the structure of a system and its functioning cannot be made. A complex system's structural elements can be known but from this the way the system functions cannot be understood since we now know that in order to understand how a system functions emergent entities have to be introduced. For example, a crystal of salt is made out of sodium chloride arranged in a symmetric way. However if the vibrations of the crystal are studied, an emergent object that can carry energy, called the phonon, is needed. The phonon was not part of the structure of the original

crystal but emerges as soon as the entire crystal is assembled.

These modern insights about emergent phenomena represent significant progress and reveal the unexpected possibilities present in nature. As a result some scientists engaged in the study of the brain feeling that the Self and consciousness could perhaps be emergent qualities of the complex brain.

However Vedanta views the Self and consciousness, not as emergent elements of a complex system, but as the unchanging universal elements that underpin all existence and represent Reality which is untouched by the laws of change and causality. Furthermore, Vedanta tells us that the human self is that Reality, which has no parts. Evidence for the existence of this Reality can be extracted from the continuity of our everyday experience of being awake, dreaming, and in deep sleep, from the testimony of sages and, in principle from personal realisation.

The assertions of Vedanta resolve the puzzle of understanding the continuity of experiences as these experiences do not depend on our changing body but on our Self, which is unchanging. Similarly, the puzzle of whether what different people experience is the same is answered, since, again the Self is one and is responsible for what we see, hear, touch, feel, or experience. The Self is accessed by our consciousness, which is thus the door of communication between us, individuals defined by our ego, and our true nature, which is free of ego and timeless.

From the perspective of Vedanta, the goal of human life is to try to realise our true timeless Self. Viewed from this changeless perspective the changing space-time-causal world we experience is an illusion.

Thus Vedanta suggests an extraordinary vision of an underlying unity and offers a challenging goal for humanity.

From this brief account it should be clear that from the standpoint of Vedanta there is no science and Vedanta. There is just one single urge present in the human race to find out what is true and that this truth has to be experienced. We are all aware that experiences cannot be described by words or photographs or music. They are unique events in our lives, which can sometimes change our view of what is important and even how we should live our lives. Words too only make sense when they are linked to experience. Looking up the meaning of a word in a dictionary will send one off on a circular trail. The search is fruitful only when we find a link, which we understand from our experience. This process of understanding is sudden and transformative. It is a mini realisation. Thus just reading about truth or hearing about truth are not enough; it has to be realised or experienced. Vedanta and science are thus striving for the same goal. In this age of compartmentalisation and specialisation, they are placed in different boxes. But truth is not in a box and where truth and knowledge are present, there is only the joy of understanding, which is a transformational experience.

Is such a vision of realisation helpful? I will answer the question at a personal level. I believe that living in the shadow of this grand vision is a dynamic life changing experience. It immediately suggests that everything in life has hidden in it a doorway that leads to greater insights and unity. Discovering the layers that lead to unity would then be a rewarding experience. Examples are everywhere. Let me give an example. Consider the counting number 2. From our experience of life we have an understanding of what this number represents: we can have two friends, and the like. When we look a bit more closely, we realise that 2 can be written in many different ways. For example: $2 = 1 + 1 = 3 - 1 = 4 - 2 = 5 - 3 = \dots$. This process of writing 2 has no end.

Thus the number 2 has infinity hidden in it. By using base 2 we can write all numbers in terms of 2. So the number 2 is linked to all numbers and this property is essential for the working of computers. A link with geometry, where numbers are represented as points on a line, can also be made. Such a geometrical picture is helpful for understanding the operations of addition and subtraction. At a deeper level sophisticated techniques of mathematics have revealed that hidden in numbers there is the world of topology, which is the mathematical study of features of space that remain unchanged under smooth deformations. Wonders of insights do not cease!

Searching for links and patterns between different parts of science is an active area of research, which illustrates the presence of a deep underlying unity in the world. This is not to suggest that such insights are implied by Vedanta. They are discoveries made by the human spirit driven by the desire to know and to understand.


An appealing feature of Vedanta is that it does not proscribe but joyfully reports on the hidden nature of existence. Reacting to this information depends on the individual. But, once one reacts positively to the vision, it becomes a living presence making one view everything in the light of this unity. Such a reaction can be at an emotional or at a practical level or at an intellectual level. Thus, for example, Vedanta at the intellectual level makes it clear that the great challenge is to understand the Self and consciousness. There is growing interest to do this among diverse groups with suggestions for such understanding coming from experts from many disciplines ranging from neuroscientists, philosophers, linguists, computer scientists, specialists in nonlinear systems to physicists with specialisation in abstract methods of quantum gravity, condensed matter, and quantum field theory. One common element in all of these approaches to understand

consciousness is that each expert feels that true understanding will come from the insights and methods of their own area of specialisation.

In this task of exploring and understanding ourselves and nature, it is the assurance of Vedanta that in order to make progress it is not great scholarship or learning that is required but concentration, a genuine desire to know, and a disciplined imagination that is willing to critically and joyfully consider even unconventional possibilities. This assurance is comforting, helpful, and inspiring.

I will end with an excerpt from a letter by the German mathematician Carl Gustav Jacob Jacobi (1804–51) to the French mathematician Legendre written on 2 July 1830: ‘Monsieur Fourier was of the opinion that the principal aim of Mathematics is to serve mankind and to explain natural phenomena; but a philosopher

such as he ought to have known that the sole aim of science is for the fulfillment of the human spirit.’¹

Fourier was a great mathematician and Jacobi’s bewilderment reflects his belief that the quest of the human spirit is to know and to understand. Practical matters do not inspire the human spirit: big challenging problems do. For the human spirit the joy of learning, understanding, and knowing rule supreme. This is where Vedanta suggests that science, the arts, and the human spirit come harmoniously together. 

Reference

1. C G J Jacobi, *Gesammelte Werke* (French), 8 vols (Berlin: Reimer, 1881), 1.454, as translated and quoted in Jean Dieudonné, *Mathematics: The Music of Reason*, trans. H G and J C Dales (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1992), v.



Carl Gustav Jacob Jacobi



Gems of Memories: Reminiscences of Swami Saradeshnananda

Swami Shuklatmananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

OFTEN I WOULD BRING garlands of jasmine, rose, or some other fragrant flowers, and sprinkling some water, keep them on a plate in Swami Saradeshnananda's room. Their fragrance would permeate the whole room. But, he would scold me every time I happened to bring a garland. He would say: 'Don't play with offered flowers. You may inadvertently tread on them.' I wondered if there could be some other reason behind his admonishment. One day I said: 'Maharaj, you have to tell me why you scold me so much for the garlands. You know I am quite careful with them.' He said: 'Should I tell you the right thing? Then your devotion will take to wings! Do you bring the garlands because they are offered to the Lord or because of their fragrance, tell me what is right? Why, I have never seen you bringing

garlands of china rose, hibiscus, or *tagara* (Pin-wheel flower)! Likewise, he did not like burning of incense sticks either. That day, he continued further: 'This holds good for incense sticks also. You bring them only for their fragrance. If you think a little, you will grasp what I'm saying. Besides, I cannot withstand the smoke of certain brands of incense sticks. It makes me cough.'

Prasad, mainly *batasha*, a kind of sugar candy, used to be distributed among the devotees at the Vrindavan ashrama. I would sometimes take those *batashas*. When Saradeshnananda came to know of this, he told me: 'The prasad is meant for devotees, you should not take it. Prasad for monks is sent to the dining hall.'

If shirts or vests were torn, Saradeshnananda used to advise us to stitch them and if we were late he would quote, 'A stitch in time saves nine'. One day I said: 'Maharaj, I heard Sri Ramakrishna used to forbid brahmacharis from stitching and you always ask me to stitch.' He replied: 'Yes, Sri Ramakrishna said many things to many persons. I tell you as I saw Holy Mother acting in different situations and as she taught us. Know for certain that that it will never be detrimental to your spiritual life. Why should I ask you to do something, which will deter your spiritual progress?'

A wonderful incident, in all its vividness, remains etched in my memory. It was dusk. The room was lit with a green night lamp. I was seated in japa on the bed beside Saradeshananda's. Suddenly after ten-fifteen minutes, an unusual noise of deep breathing drew my attention. He was trying to get up on his own. I sat on my place and continued to watch what he was trying to do. First, he turned on his side and then, resting on his elbow, tried to lift himself up. But he could not, and stared blankly at me for some time. He again resumed his effort, but this time also he could not. With folded hands, in a mood of sincere prayer, he looked at the picture of Sri Ramakrishna and remained motionless. Now, I could not help getting up from my seat and asked: 'What are you doing, Maharaj?' At first he was startled to hear my voice. He could not imagine that I was noticing everything. Then he said: 'Lift me up! Help me to sit. You have sat for japa, I am also feeling a strong urge to sit for japa. It is dusk already and I am accustomed to sit at this time. Please make me sit and then you go.' With some effort, I made him sit up and went to my place. But, I could hardly do any japa as my whole attention was riveted on him. I noticed that though he was absorbed in japa, his body started to lean backwards. I crept silently to his side and held him firmly, lest he should fall from the bed. Realising the situation, he said: 'Hold me like this for a while. Let me sit.'

Being in that position for some time, his body gradually stooped forward, and saliva came out from his mouth. His cloth was wet with saliva. After some time, he said: 'No, I cannot endure anymore! There is excruciating pain in my knees. Better, you help me to sit on the floor with the help of a pillow.' I said: 'It is not possible. I cannot do it alone. It will be difficult to get you up again. Moreover, if you fall down, others will blame me!' He simply yielded to me, and lied down like a small child.

All the monks of the ashrama used to come to his room daily for offering salutations. One day I asked him: 'Maharaj, all the monks salute you daily, but I don't. Would I be then deprived of your blessings?' He said: 'I don't like such ostentatious display of salutations every day. If you render your service in the proper spirit, you need not ask for blessings, they will come on their own.'

Doing service is extremely difficult. It was not that I could always perform this without any flaws. At some point of time, it struck me that if Saradeshananda were displeased with my service, it would be harmful for my spiritual life. Being quite anxious about this, one day I openly expressed my fear to him and begged for his forgiveness. Hearing this, he replied with a smile: 'Of course, you should strive for perfection, but do not think too much about it. To err is human. Could you continue your service, if I bothered about your faults?' Then he added: 'See, our lives are all blessings. We have no curses. Never does the slightest antagonistic thought cross our minds. And you are always with me! What to speak of you? Do not bother about such trifling matters.'

Once when he found me trying to remove an unstamped postal stamp, he severely rebuked me, saying: 'It amounts to committing a theft. Don't do this again!'

In his reply to a letter from a brahmachari, he repeatedly stressed: 'Always be respectful and obedient to the head of your ashrama. You'll be in peace.' When I drew his attention to the repetition, he said: 'I'll repeat a thousand times if required. Why not? It will be then imprinted on his mind firmly.' Later, when I recounted the incident to the brahmachari, he admitted: 'I was really having a tough time with the head of my ashrama, but I couldn't write that to Saradeshananda. He was absolutely right about that.'

Once a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission asked

Saradeshananda: 'Maharaj, do you sleep well?'

Saradeshananda: 'Yes, what little sleep I get is sufficient for me.'

Monk: 'How do you spend your time lying on bed all day? What do you do apart from your daily routine like scriptural studies or taking food?'

Saradeshananda: 'Apart from those routine activities, I spend my time in my own way. I have my own regimen in this regard.'

Monk: 'That's what I'm asking. What's that regimen?'

Saradeshananda: 'I do japa, meditation, and contemplation as long as I can, but you know, it is not possible all the time. Rest of the time I try to dwell upon the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Now, leave aside those things. Do think over the three points I told you before: (1) Improvement of the brahmacharis' training centre. (2) Making a single district for Jayrambati and Kamarpukur. (3) Setting good examples in all the three streams of Ramakrishna Mission's work: cultural, educational, and medical at our Delhi centre.'

Monk: 'Maharaj, you're talking of work, but now the mood of inaction, the state of worklessness, is taking over. Now I wish to turn away from everything and stay quiet in a place.'

Saradeshananda: 'Know for certain that being without work is not same as being in the "state of inaction" as eulogised in the scriptures. Thus think like this: "Therefore, think of me at all times and fight. There is no doubt that by dedicating your mind and intellect to me, you will attain me alone."¹⁴ Also: "O Achyuta, my delusion has been destroyed and memory has been regained by me through your grace. I stand with my doubt removed; I shall follow your instruction"' (18.73).

Monk: 'What is that instruction?'

Saradeshananda: 'That you'll feel in the core of your heart.'

Monk: 'While we ought to be doing japa, meditation, and study whole day long, we are instead running to advocate's house, minister's house, and so on. And we are also not exempted from the oblique remarks of people that we run after people in the corridors of power.'

Saradeshananda: 'What are you saying? Has there been any religious organisation till today that could flourish without the support of royal power? Come to think of this, our Order has hardly received any support so far. Rather, it has met with opposition at every step. For Sri Ramakrishna's work, we have to go to all sorts of people, if need be. And above all, you're not doing this for your sake, it is his work after all. You're talking about spiritual practices. Well, to the best of your ability, you have to perform that too. When the workload will be too much, you can sit on bed, right before sleeping and before waking up, and do japa and meditation as best as you can.'

Monk: 'When I come here next, I will take you to Belur Math. Many nice boys are coming to Sri Ramakrishna. They will learn from your life.'

Saradeshananda: 'I find it difficult to turn even on the bed, and you say that you'll be taking me to Belur Math!'

As the monk still insisted on his going to Belur Math, Saradeshananda said: 'I'm in Belur Math only. Do you think I'm outside?'

'Oh! You're evading the matter!' The monk replied smilingly.

Saradeshananda: 'We have had enough talk today. Please come again. Radhe, Radhe!'

While leaving, the monk told me: 'You try to persuade him. I will bear the flight fare for both of you.'

When the monk left, I tried to persuade Saradeshananda to go to Belur Math, upon which he warned me: 'If I go to the Math, you will not have the chance to serve me. You were supposed to be

in the brahmacharis' training centre long ago. Now if you go, they will catch hold of you and put you in the training centre. They will appoint someone else in your place. Then you will repent.' I did not try to persuade him ever after this.

Once a devotee, who was leaving Vrindavan, told him: 'Maharaj, during the Durga Puja this year, I will surely bring my children.' Saradeshananda told him: 'Don't you say this so emphatically. Say, I'll try to bring them.' However, it came to pass that the devotee could not come to Vrindavan for some reason.

One of the brahmacharis, just after joining the Sevashrama, went to Kalababu Kunj, where Holy Mother had stayed during her visit to Vrindavan, in the morning and returned to the ashrama after dusk, doing japa and meditation. Meanwhile, Saradeshananda enquired after him many times. When the brahmachari returned, he lovingly explained to him: 'You see, my boy, if you eat ten days' food in a day and starve for the next three days, will it be good for your health? No. Similar is the case in spiritual life. If you do spiritual practices irregularly, you will be doing more harm than good. You are sure to get real benefit in spiritual life if you practise regularly and diligently. If one doesn't have a regular routine life in the beginning, life becomes much difficult afterwards. On special occasions or in times of heavy workload or illness there may be some deviation, but otherwise, it's always better to start slow and remain steady. I'm telling you all these only for your good, please don't feel hurt.'

There was one brahmachari of flippant nature. He would always be making fun with everybody. Saradeshananda called him one day and told: 'If you always indulge in frivolities, you will lose the capacity to become serious, however much you try later. Your very nature will eventually become shallow. It's a different thing if you are occasionally in lighter moods. You will run into greater

danger, if you are slack from the beginning. Later, people will hardly pay any heed to you.'

Once a senior monk of our Order came to stay in Vrindavan Sevashrama for a couple of weeks. He used to daily come to Saradeshananda. One day he was talking with Saradeshananda regarding the expansion of our Order. In the course of conversation, the erstwhile situation of monastic resources and amount of work came up. Then Saradeshananda told him: 'The whole world is thirsty for the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Half of our qualified monks are huddled up in our educational institutions. We need to utilise them properly.'

(To be continued)

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14. Bhagavadgita, 8.7.



Saga of Epic Proportions

Swami Sandarshananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

TWO YEARS LATER one finds that Nivedita was convinced by the views of Bose, though in a much liberal way. She seems to have been influenced by the Brahmoism as preached by Bose but understanding it in the light of Swamiji's teachings. On 11 January 1901 she wrote to Miss Macleod from Wimbledon:

Last Sunday I lectured twice at Thenbridge Wells, and met Sara grand there. It was an extraordinary thing that came to me there. I told you that I was trying to lay hold of Brahmoism. Well, S. Sara [Mrs Bull] says I am not doing that at all, but at any rate, on Sunday night it was a religious service at which I had to speak, and I found myself taking the *highest* part of everything Swami has ever given us. Then I understood in a flash that my notion about Brahmoism had been a kind of call to me to do this, which I should never have done, perhaps, without the invitation from another's need. So I am able to realise that I really may have been using images to thwart and blind my vision of the One. And that until I have achieved that vision, I may not go back to the image. I cannot tell you the peace of this discovery. And is it not a wonderful proof of the truth of Adwaita that Swami is so tremendous that *every* path means faithfulness to him?

How I have realized that, in talking to Dr. Bose sometimes! He would not discuss with me the points on which Swami and he differed because it would be dishonourable. And I have always had to urge: 'Don't you *see* this man is so large that as long as you are faithful to Truth

and to yourself, you CANNOT be in antagonism to him?'

In the same way, it is extraordinary to see in Dr. Bose how that old idea of Adwaita behind him saves him from errors that other men of science walk into blindfold.³²

But the significant transformation Bose had undergone by close association with Sister Nivedita over the years is estimable from a letter she wrote to Miss Macleod on 19 May 1911 from Mayavati. In it she narrated an incident that makes a clean breast of Bose's ability to gauge the depth of the spiritual personality of Swamiji's guru Sri Ramakrishna, conveying thereby his agreement with Swamiji's faith as well, so to say. Nivedita wrote:

Yesterday I had to start a talk amongst the monks and novices up at the Ashrama. I spoke of the necessity for the highest learning, amongst the followers of religion—and some of the youngsters aired their own ideas about Sri Ramakrishna not being learned. Afterwards the Bairn (Dr. Bose) said he was so angry, he could hardly contain himself. Did they *realise* what it meant, to sit day after day beside the Ganges changing earth and gold from hand to hand, till He could throw them both away? Did fools not see what an effort of the mind was there? Did they suppose it made any difference, whether that found expression in Mathematics or Greek or Physics, or Religion? Couldn't they see that it was the essences of *learning*? (2.1201-2).

Such a sensible reaction from Bose was naturally a matter of great joy to Nivedita, for she

found him of much evolved perception now, after having tried so long to reform his preconceived Brahmo ideas which she knew were putting hindrances in the way of his understanding religion truly. Hence she concluded saying—‘I was so thrilled. Wasn’t it dear’ (2.1202).

It was at the behest of Bose that Swamiji translated the *Nasadiya Sukta* of the *Rig Veda*. He had immense love and regards for Swamiji and the message of Swamiji’s sudden demise had dealt him with a severe blow. Expressing his extraordinary grief and dismay he wrote to Miss Macleod within three days of Swamiji’s passing, on 7 July 1902: ‘I cannot tell you how grieved I am to send you the enclosed copy of a telegram which came for Mrs. Bull. India has lost her great son [in Swami Vivekananda]. But his has been a heroic life, and he carried the banner of glory’ (2.1285).

Being able to correctly understand the immense value of Swamiji’s contribution, Bose wrote another letter to Sister Nivedita from London on 9 July. He had said in it: ‘What a void this makes! What great things were accomplished in these few years! How one man could have done it all! And how all is stilled now! ... I seem to see him [Vivekananda] just as I saw him in Paris two years ago ... the strong man with the large hope, everything large about him. I cannot tell you what a great sadness has come’ (1.529). One day before on 8 July, to Mrs Ole Bull, who was equally close to him, he wrote: ‘It seems to me that nothing is lost and all the great thoughts and work and service and hope remain embodied in and about the place which gave them birth. All our life is but an echo of a few great moments, an echo which reverberates through all time ... That great soul is released; his heroic deeds on this earth are over. Can we realise what that work has been—how one man did all this? When one is tired it is best that he should sleep,

but his deeds and teachings will walk the earth and waken and strengthen’ (ibid.).

Because Bose earned such unqualified confidence and affection of Swamiji with a national purpose behind, Swamiji’s Western women disciples such as Nivedita, Bull, Macleod religiously protected him and gave patronage without stint, to which the British Government was hostile and relentlessly tried to throttle him down. To this group of three, the name of Mrs Sevier should also be added, for she hosted the Boses at Mayavati more than once affectionately with a pronounced sense of filial relationship. It was, as it were, a heavenly abode for them to settle and pursue work in peace, far from the madding crowd under the serene wings of guardian angel Mrs Sevier. After going there with Nivedita in 1906 they had again gone there in May 1911 with her for a serious work. Dr Bose and Nivedita together finished writing ‘12 chapters of his book *Irritability of Plants*’ at Mayavati on this occasion. Giving an introduction to Mayavati from there on 23 May 1911, Nivedita wrote to Dr T K Cheyne of Oxford University, whom she admired deeply for his learning and character as well as his love for India, and who reviewed her book *Master as I Saw Him* in scintillating terms and with high appreciation. The way she had offered the brief account is enough for one to see how Mayavati was dear to her.

Yet here, at Mayavati, one thinks much of saintly meditation—for this is the estate bought and made into a monastery by Swamiji’s two English disciples, Mr. and Mrs. Sevier. The husband died here—but Mrs. Sevier is still living, a cheery little old lady, surrounded by her gardens and little duties of household and hospitality, and playing a game of croquet every evening! It was Mr. Sevier’s longing to meditate that made this. When we were last here the third man-eating tiger had just been killed, in the neighbourhood. Now, a like sad fame has been gained by



Sister Nivedita along with Mrs Sevier, Abala Bose, and Sister Christine at Mayavati

a certain leopard, who was seen yesterday twice, quite near the gardens! So we are, for the moment, quite excited, and none is allowed to go out for walks alone (2.1202).

On June 12 she wrote to Mr and Mrs Ratcliffe from Mayavati: 'We are working on—well—many chapters drafted, for a new book—and much done, in many directions' (2.1205). Prior to this, on June 5 she explained to them the position of his research and desire to write on him. She said:

The man of Science [Dr Bose] has been concocting the most wonderful and doubt-destroying instruments all Winter—and we are now beginning the 3 volumed romance of the same. I can't see what can be said after these are published.

He has arrived at a stage where he puts a plant in an instrument and leaves it to excite itself record itself rest itself and then begin all over again! Untouched all the while!!! I feel how very short life might prove—how suddenly it might end—for any one of us—and my one anxiety is to get the *facts* recorded—I don't care how roughly. Then—a corrected edition of Swamiji—and the materials for a Memoir of the Man of Science—and I think my responsibilities are ended. Of course there are still a few books that may be written by oneself—but these seem very unimportant, compared to the others—especially the Memoir (2.1203).

The memoir unfortunately she couldn't start at all, though about which she was so keen. She died in four months of its proposition the same year.

The meeting between Swamiji and Jagadish Chandra Bose at the Paris Congress in 1900 was a landmark event. Earlier, the relationship between them was apparently somewhat different. Bose judged Swamiji from his Brahmo angle of vision, which was myopic. Swamiji, knowing full well of Bose's reservation against his religious notions and traditional practices, was nevertheless hopeful about Bose for his achievements in science. He fervently believed Bose would soon have a liberal religious view anyway. Swamiji didn't see any quarrel between science and religion. To him, a man of science was full of possibilities. The way Bose struggled for the cause of science in India was a matter of great interest to Swamiji. Swamiji was earnestly looking forward to Bose being recognised at an international forum, before the well-known scientists of the world. That actually happened in Paris before his eyes. Bose also observed how Swamiji was already famous and known to many great people of the West. Both exceptionally honoured there, had become too close to each other, one feeling proud of the other countryman. Bose's transformation in its consummation could be seen from those three letters he wrote to Mrs Bull, Miss Macleod, and Sister Nivedita after Swamiji's passing. By then, Swamiji had become to him unparalleled. Therefore, Swamiji's loss to him seemed irreparable. Whatever he had expressly said in those letters clearly hint so. The change in Bose was, indubitably, the result of Nivedita's labour. As Swamiji brought Nivedita to heel and built her, with utter forbearance, clearing impediments in the way of manifestation of her originality, so did Nivedita with Bose.

Swamiji's joy at Bose's success in Paris Exhibition as an Indian representative was unbounded. He abundantly noted on that day, when Bose presented his paper at the 'International Congress of Physicists', which was published in his

Bengali work *Pariuvrajak* subsequently, and which was also later translated into English as *Memoirs of An European Travel*. Swamiji wrote:

Today is the 23rd October; tomorrow evening I am to take leave of Paris. This year Paris is a centre of the civilised world, for it is the year of the Paris Exhibition, and there has been an assemblage of eminent men and women from all quarters of the globe. The master-minds of all countries have met today in Paris to spread the glory of their respective countries by means of their genius. The fortunate man whose name the bells of this great centre will ring today will at the same time crown his country also with glory, before the world. And where art thou, my Motherland, Bengal, in the great capital city swarming with German, French, English, Italian, and other scholars? Who is there to utter thy name? Who is there to proclaim thy existence? From among that white galaxy of geniuses there stepped forth one distinguished youthful hero to proclaim the name of our Motherland, Bengal—it was the world-renowned scientist, Dr. J. C. Bose! Alone, the youthful Bengali physicist, with galvanic quickness, charmed the Western audience today with his splendid genius; that electric charge infused pulsations of new life into the half-dead body of the Motherland! At the top of all physicists today is—Jagadish Chandra Bose, an Indian, a Bengali! Well done, hero! Whichever countries, Dr. Bose and his accomplished, ideal wife may visit, everywhere they glorify India—add fresh laurels to the crown of Bengal. Blessed pair!³³

Participation in the Paris Congress was possible because of 'the initiative of Sir John Woodburn'. But, earlier, the Bengal government was opposed to it, regarding which Swamiji was well aware. The conspiracy to thwart Bose was intolerable to him. On 17 June, a few months before the Congress, Swamiji wrote to Miss Mary Hale in a letter: 'You are entirely mistaken if you think the Boses are rejected by the

Hindu people. The English rulers want to push him into a corner. They don't of course like that sort of development in the Indian race. They make it hot for him, that is why he seeks to go elsewhere' (8.523). Swamiji's feeling of concern for Bose was deep. His sympathy generated for him because Nivedita discussed Bose's problems with Swamiji seriously, whenever opportunity permitted her. Swamiji's interactions with the Boses helped in the matter as well. Boses came to Belur Math, so also Swamiji had called on them, which perhaps evoked informality of some sort that probably assisted in that respect as well.

Swamiji's excitement over Bose's success in the Paris Congress was not only because Bose was his countryman. It was also because of the high appreciation, Swamiji observed, of the paper he presented, by the scientists in the audience. The paper was a matter of persistent discussion. Talking about this, his biographer Patrick Geddes said that it was at 'greater length than usual'.³⁴ It so conspicuously occurred, 'because of its (the paper's) importance as *including new departures*' (ibid.). In terms of the research and the novelty of its result, though the work was surprising, it was nonetheless a cause for heartburn to many scientists, especially to the physiologists. About the content of the paper the Bose centenary publication wrote:

This happened in 1899 in connection with the responsive phenomena in the parallelisms between the response of what is called 'inorganic' matter and the response of 'living' substances. He found that the curve fatigue of his instrument closely resembled the fatigue-curve of an animal tissue. He was able to remove the 'tiredness' of his receiver by the application of rest and of suitable stimulants. He was thus, as he said later, unconsciously led to the border region of Physics and Physiology and was amazed to find the boundary lines vanishing and points

of contact emerging between the realms of the living and non-living. In his investigation of 'life'-phenomena Prof Bose was also led to the study of the response of plants, the half-way house between inorganic matter and highly complex animal life.³⁵

The physiologists were not, unfortunately, ready to tolerate a physicist entering into their territory undesirably. From then on, they eventually tried to block him in various unfair ways. Besides, there was a keen racial pride prevailing in the midst of the British scientists that wouldn't brook any Indian scientist rise to that level of honour and reputation by virtue of his unprecedented accomplishment such as the one Bose had incomparably achieved. He was a victim of British racial discrimination before going to Paris because of his groundbreaking scientific activities in India which thus repeated itself in a consequence of his success in an international Congress abroad. British racial behaviour in India against Bose cut both Swamiji and Nivedita to the quick, in order to become his conscientious sympathisers and staunch supporters, with the effect that Nivedita now grew into a crusader against the British conspiracy to clampdown Indian science.

Dr Bose was in incessant trouble thereafter. It was either for racial interest or for the personal interest of the English. His life was then a battle against unimaginable odds, in which Nivedita fought alongside him to the finish. Bose read the same paper at the Bradford British Association in September 1900. The paper was applauded by the physicists similarly. But the physiologists felt disturbed and observed an ominous silence there. His paper, on the other hand, was deemed so important that he was offered a job in England. As his paper created waves, he was invited to lecture before the Royal Society. This upset the apple cart for him.

Here also the physicists were full of his praise. But the physiologists were uncomfortable. They now broke their silence and strongly objected that he had applied the proof of physics incorrectly in a case of physiology. Unfortunately, Bose suddenly fell seriously ill at that moment and required surgical intervention immediately, for proper treatment. After staying bedridden for two months, he resumed his work in the Davy Faraday Laboratory and showed that his finding was equally applicable in the field of physiology as proof.

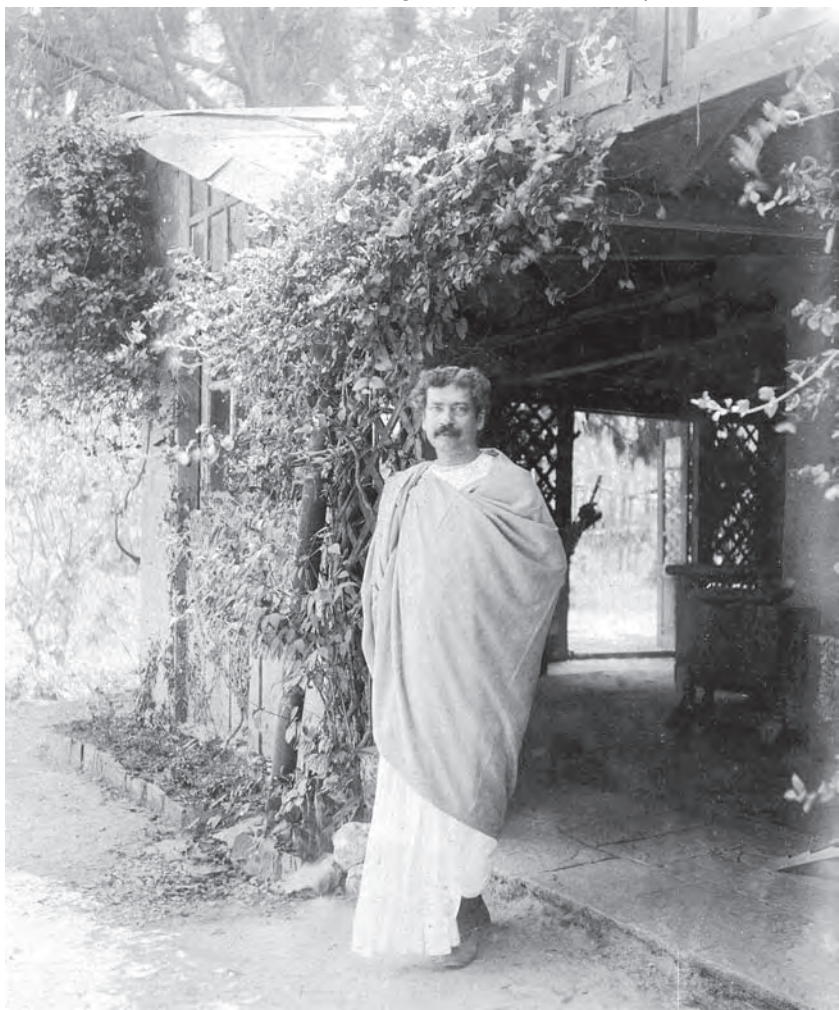
On 10 May 1901 Dr Bose presented a paper basing his latest research before the Royal Society. Although the physiologists kept quiet initially, they nevertheless vehemently opposed in a meeting on 6 June 1901, catching Bose by surprise. As a result, the Royal Society could not publish his paper because of the objection of its two senior physiologists, even while it was being already printed. Adding insult to injury, these physiologists then inspired the British government in India to stop the extension of his deputation period in England, which was absolutely necessary to carry on his researches for the sake of the completion of his work. He therefore decidedly went on furlough.

The Lilian Society, however, arranged his lecture on 21 March 1902, appreciating his achievement very much. It subsequently published his paper in its journal, despite the doors of Royal Society being closed to him for the same. But the final blow came when he fell prey to the extreme meanness of one of those physiologists, who objected at the Royal Institute. He said some of the things Bose

had said in the journal of Lilian Society were already published. In fact, he took extensive notes from the paper while Bose was presenting it before the Royal Society earlier. Thus stealing material from Bose, he passed it in his own name meanwhile. Happily, when an investigation was carried out, the truth was established and Bose's precedence over him was at last proved and vindicated for good. Finding no other way, in the end he resolved to write books, in order to be able to bring the results of his researches out before the world. To tide over the difficulties giving a good fight could never have been possible, had it not been Nivedita's relentless help and support being constantly beside him.

From the very outset Nivedita was too anxious about Bose's coming to Paris. On 26

Dr Jagadish Chandra Bose at Mayavati



December 1899 she gave the message to Mrs Bull with a great sense of relief that 'Dr. Bose has been actually invited to Paris.'³⁶ In this letter her feeling of concern for him was quite visible. She thought a lectureship abroad would help him a lot. She was worried, for she saw how sensitive Bose was to the racial discrimination. She wrote:

How I wish he could get the lectureship—surely that would smooth things out. Anyway, I hope he will come—and never go back. The suffering that race-prestige engenders in so sensitive a nature is fatal—and the climate is not conducive to research either. And yet, you know, I am glad that these things are in the hands of the World-Mother who sees what is really best—for dear India! Does She not want everyone who loves Her, on the spot? (ibid.).

But, alas, Nivedita could hardly imagine how badly Bose would face racial hatred after coming to the West. The same she wrote in another letter to Miss Macleod, giving the news of his coming to Paris as well as expressing her anxiety.

Dr. Bose's discoveries are going on apace. He has been working for 5 months without even a Sunday's rest. The scientific Congress has asked him to Paris—but he is not sure of accepting—practical difficulties being many. For my part, I want him to come, feeling sure he will not return. I think I shall enclose their letters—Swami would like to hear his—asking you to send them on to Mrs. Bull. Oh I *wish* that American lectureship could be got for him! (1.274).

At this time both Swamiji and Nivedita were in the US, but at different places. There was a perfect communication between Swamiji and all his lady disciples now, with the giving and taking news about Bose among themselves. Therefore, one finds in Nivedita's letter of 13 January 1900 telling Macleod: 'I received a letter from Dr. Bose last night, and one sentence

in it will show Swami that *he* also "knows"' (21.98). Though she formally closed the letter here yet she had added a few paragraphs in it below, in one of which she told again: 'When Swami has read Dr. Bose's letter—will you send it on to S. Sara [Mrs Bull]?' (1.299). It clearly indicates that whatever Nivedita was doing to Bose had an approval from Swamiji and she believed it was nothing but Swamiji's work. In tune with this idea is her letter to Swamiji on the same day, that is, 13 January 1900.

My beloved father,

Your birthday-poem reached me here last night. There is nothing I could say about it that would not seem common-place. Except that if your beautiful wish were possible it would break my heart—for here I am one with Ram Prasad—'I do not want to become sugar—I want to *eat* sugar!' I do not want even to know God in anyway—even to think of such things is ridiculous of course—that would not leave my Father unattainably above!

I know one would not need to think of one's guru—that he would vanish—if one realised the Divine—but even in that moment I cannot conceive of perfect bliss without the assurance that his was greater.

One is trying to say impossible things, to think unthinkable thoughts—but you will know what I would express.

I used to think that I wanted to work for the women of India—I used to have all kinds of grand impersonal ideas—but I have steadily gone on climbing down from these heights—and today I want to do things only because they are my Father's will. Even knowledge of GOD seems too like a return of benefits. One longs to serve for serving's sake, for ever and ever, dear Master—not for our miserable little life!

And another thing I am sure of, and need to be sure of, in true moments, and that is that you will have thousands of children who will be bigger and worthier and able to love you and

serve you infinitely better than I, in days that are close at hand.

Now Swami—you have to acknowledge that you were mistaken—America for ever! In Jackson Mich. there lived a man to whom your name was as a red rag to the infuriate bull. Today he is your friend and mine—because—your daughter has a sense of humour!!!!!!

Margot (1.299–300).

A letter of this kind speaks ostensibly for itself. First, that Nivedita weathered many a storm within and had eventually emerged triumphant is pronounced in its content. Second—and the most significant—that her affection and attachment for Swamiji was intact—although there was a bit of misunderstanding in her for a while, which ultimately disappeared in consequence of an intense introspection. Third, that her bond with Swamiji as his spiritual daughter wore stronger. In a word, between its address ‘My beloved father’ and its signature ‘Margot’ below is visibly wrapped the guileless heart of a chaste girl who is now a mellow maiden and has no locus, whatsoever, without the hallowed presence of her dear father. The tempest that once razed her mind is seen in the letter tempered by a sweet sentiment, implying her act of propping Bose was included in her ‘Father’s will’ for rescuing Indian science from the clutches of British destructive policy.

On the other hand, Swamiji looked upon her as his affectionate child, who required patient, intelligent, and intimate handling, exercising the utmost sense of forbearance, for an unimpeded unfolding of her rare qualities. The sobriquet *Margot* he used for calling her indicates how deep and true was his love and affection for her. It was indeed as fatherly as any other dotting father to his dear fickle daughter. The urge to please his daughter he had composed a poem substantiating it with his heartfelt blessings, and

sent it to her as her birthday present.

The mother’s heart, the hero’s will,
The sweetness of the southern breeze,
The sacred charm and strength that dwell
On Aryan altars, flaming, free;
All these be yours, and many more
No ancient soul could dream before—
Be thou to India’s future son
The mistress, servant, friend in one.³⁷

The poem is a neat expression of Swamiji’s expectation from Nivedita in verse, which she, needless to say, fulfilled in due course, wading through countless hurdles.

The same attitude and feeling could be noticed in Nivedita with Jagadish Chandra Bose. The Scottish word ‘bairn’ meaning a child she used for him in letters was the result of her study of his character. She started applying it from November 1900, giving an expression to her truly maternal nature. Though Bose was senior to her by ten years, yet she observed he was as simple as a child, who still required affectionate protection and care of a loving mother whose only dream was the highest attainments in science for her dear child, who was such a genius.

(To be continued)

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BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy

Manana

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE consists of three stages: *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana*. Since the Upanishads exhort one to do *manana*, it is necessary to know the meaning of this word and what exactly is meant by the practice of *manana*. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word *manana* is derived from the root *man*, which means to think, to believe, to imagine, to suppose, to conjecture, to regard, to consider, to praise, to approve, to have an opinion, to agree, to honour, to esteem, to hope, to wish, to pray, to remember, to meditate, to mention, to declare, to cogitate, to invent, to perceive, to observe, to learn, to know, to understand, to comprehend, to offer, to present, to examine, and to investigate. *Manana* means thinking, reflection, meditation, thought, intelligence, understanding, and deliberation.

Manana follows *shravana*. Through *shravana*, the spiritual aspirant gets convinced of the true meaning of the Upanishadic statements regarding the identity of Atman and Brahman. This conviction is made stronger through *manana*, by which the logical validity of the truth understood and assimilated by *shravana* is put to test through strong reasoning and analysis. This is done to avoid the probability of the cropping up of doubt regarding Brahman or its identity with Atman.

Manana involves the assimilation of all logical arguments and ratiocinations aimed at removing all thoughts contradictory to the main teaching of Vedanta. This has to be done following the

six *lingas*, signs: *upakrama-upasamhara*, beginning-conclusion; *abhyasa*, repetition; *apurvata*, originality; *phalam*, result; *arthavada*, eulogy; and *upapatti*, logical determination of meaning. *Manana* should be done continuously, without any break. It leads to the discarding of all that is not related to Brahman and makes one continue in the path of all that is connected to Brahman. Without *manana*, *shravana* would be the mere assimilation of Vedantic texts without enough strength. Hence, *manana* becomes an important link in the Vedantic process of realising Brahman and removes all defects in one's understanding.

Shravana and *manana* are continued till one gets merged in *nididhyasana* by oneself. Therefore, *shravana* and *manana* become one continuous logical process. They should be performed along with the practices of *shama*, the control of mind; *dama*, restraint of the senses; *uparati*, withdrawal of the senses from the sense-objects; *titiksha*, forbearance; *shraddha*, faith in oneself, the scriptures, and one's guru; and *sama-dhana*, one-pointed continuous concentration. *Manana* should be also accompanied by meditation. Hence, both *shravana* and *manana* are actions to be performed diligently by the spiritual aspirant in order to lead to the process of *nididhyasana*. For undergoing the process of *manana*, one needs tremendous patience, intelligence, and alertness to understand the various alternatives for and against the Vedantic dictum and one has to understand the principle behind the realm of duality, in order to eventually transcend it.

PB

TRADITIONAL TALES

The Garland Honour



IMAGE: WWW.ARTIC.EDU / COW SUCKLING A CALF, INDIA, C. 9 CE

LAKSHMI ASKED: 'O my child! Why are you so sad today? You haven't even drunk your milk. Yes, Lakshmi was that cow's name.

'Mother, see that goat-kid. She is pitch-black. She is much smaller than me and is also lazy. Yet, our master's son loves her so much! He feeds her grass and other food with his own hands and calls her affectionately. He has tied beautiful bells on her neck. He oils her horns daily. And, look at poor me! None to care;

none to feed me even dry hay! No one to give me water even if my tongue goes dry! I ask, what defect do I have?' Thus lamented the calf to his mother.

'Son, don't worry in vain. This world is like that. Here, getting more happiness and more honour is something to be afraid of. Behind worldly happiness is hidden many problems like disease, worry, fall, and death. Don't be unnecessarily jealous at others' happiness. All this

hospitality and attention is similar to the fulfilling of the desires of one, who is about to die. Poor goat-kid! She is nearing death. They are feeding her and making her fat just for killing her. Dry hay is enough for us!' Thus said mother Lakshmi.

Some months passed. One evening, Lakshmi was returning home after grazing outside. She felt something wrong. She ran to her calf only to see him shaking in fear. He did not even call her 'mother'. He did not come hopping to her. Instead, he was standing against the wall, in great fear. Mother Lakshmi was greatly alarmed and reached her calf in one jump. Licking him with her tongue, she asked: 'O son, why are you shaking in fear today?'

'Mother, today they garlanded and decorated

that goat-kid and gave her something to eat. They caressed her affectionately. Soon, a man with a big moustache came. In one blow of a knife, he severed the goat's head. There was a big scream. That goat's legs shook for some time and became still. Those murderers cut her body into pieces. See there, the bloodstains are still there. I am shaking in fear since I saw this.' Thus stammered the calf.

'Son, haven't I told you earlier that one has to be very careful about things like worldly pleasures, name and fame, and garland honour? They are gradually followed by disease, worry, fall, and destruction.' Saying this affectionately, mother Lakshmi removed the calf's fear and fed her milk.

PR



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA, publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Finders Keepers?— A True Story in India Robert Arnett

Atman Press, 2104 Cherokee Avenue, Columbus, Georgia 31906-1424, USA. Website: www.AtmanPress.com. Email: AtmanPress@gmail.com. 2013. \$14.95. 36 pp. HB. ISBN 9780965290081.

A book designed for children with attractive illustrations, this volume brings out the spirit of India through the recounting of an incident that happened in India; where a boy—not wealthy of resources—returns a wallet he found and cannot even think of accepting a reward for his good act. Awarded with the ‘Mom’s Choice Best Educational Picture Book’, ‘Independent Publisher Outstanding Books of the Year’, ‘Benjamin Franklin Multicultural Silver’, and ‘The National Parenting Center Seal of Approval’, this book explains different Indian traditions and values through a trip to Rajasthan. With a short glossary and a guide for making *torans*, Indian festoons, this book is a keepsake that would remind all to listen to ‘the silent voice within each of us that prompts us to do what is right’ (2).

Editor
Prabuddha Bharata



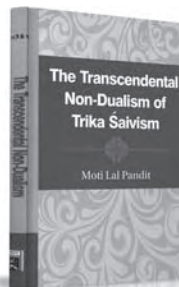
Free: Why Science Hasn't Disproved Free Will Alfred R. Mele

Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, USA. Website: www.oup.com. 2014. \$14.95. xii + 100 pp. HB. ISBN 9780199371624.

The argument against free will could as well have been eternal. In this short but incisive and analytical book, Alfred R. Mele, a professor of philosophy, successfully and clearly critiques the

rationale against free will put forward by psychologists and neuroscientists. Mele presents the two types of arguments right at the beginning of the book: ‘There are two main scientific arguments today against the existence of free will. One comes from neuroscience. Its basic claim is that all our decisions are made unconsciously and therefore not freely. The other argument comes from social psychology. This time, the basic claim is that factors of which we are unaware have such a powerful influence on our behavior that no room remains for remain will’ (1). He further points at the pivotal point of free will: ‘Deciding *freely* depends on deciding *consciously*’ (4). Written in a simple and highly accessible language, this book is a strong voice for free will and also clearly shows how ‘the scientific findings are not all they are cracked up to be’ (78). A must read for all who are concerned with free will.

Editor
Prabuddha Bharata



The Transcendental Non-Dualism of Trika Śaivism Moti Lal Pandit

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., PO Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110055. www.mrm-lonline.com. 2014. ₹ 795. xxii + 270 pp. HB. ISBN 9788121512695.

An eminent scholar in Vedic studies and Buddhist philosophy, Moti Lal Pandit has now written a clear introduction to Trika Shaivism of Kashmir. After Acharya Shankara’s brief sojourn in Kashmir, his Advaita philosophy seems to have been adopted by many, though his *adhyasa*, *maya*, theory had no takers. Known generally as Kashmir Shaivism, the major teachers of this discipline were Vasubandhu, Kallata, and Abhinavagupta, among others. Besides, this Trika School of Shaivism puts forward the important concept of *spandana*,

throbbing: 'According to this doctrine, the Absolute is inherently of the nature of pulsation, which is to say that reality, being kinetic, is not so passive and inactive as is the *brahman* of Advaita Vedanta of Śaṅkara. ... It is on the basis of this conceptual thinking that the Trika has made use of such philosophical terms as would establish the dynamic character of the Absolute—and the terms that express this idea are *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*' (3).

In this manner Trika Shaivism steers away from the possibilities of nihilism as that of the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna. There is a natural transition to the Trika idea of Shiva and Shakti with the self-luminous Absolute being termed as Paramashiva. The Absolute is seen as jnana, knowledge and Shakti, energy. The author gives a clear idea of the different states inspired by *spandana*, which is envisioned as an 'embodiment of the unity of all divine powers'. As with almost every school of Indian philosophy, the Trika literature is also a vast ocean. Its many formats call for comparisons with Vishishtadvaita, Shaiva Siddhanta, and the Siddha phenomena. The ultimate aim of Trika Shaivism is disembodied liberation that brings *jagadananda*, universal bliss.

Meanwhile, the aspirants need not despair of ever gaining *jagadananda*, for there are many steps given to suit individual types for making steady progress. There are the superior and inferior ways, both of which are explained in detail by the author. To the latter belongs the *shakta-upaya*. Most important of all to be noted is the high place given to the guru. It is believed that Paramashiva, who liberates, also comes as the guru to help the aspirant attain liberation. Apart from his five powers—consciousness, bliss, will, knowledge, and expansion—Paramashiva is said to possess a sixth power: pure vision called *mahamaya*. This imperceptibly leads us to the tantra part of Trika, the twelve Kalis, the triad of Jyeshtha, Raudri, and Vama, whose work roughly corresponds to the *srishti*, *sthithi*, and *pralaya* concepts—creation, preservation, and dissolution. Altogether a highly scholarly work, this book is also a fascinating narrative by Moti Lal Pandit.

Prema Nandakumar

Researcher and Literary Critic
Srirangam



A Geology of Media

Jussi Parikka

University of Minnesota Press, Suite 290 111 Third Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55401, USA. Website: www.upress.umn.edu. 2015. \$87.50. 224 pp. HB. ISBN 9780816695515.

Finnish new media theorist Jussi Parikka's recent book *A Geology of Media* begins with a definition of geology from Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1810–33) which made a huge impact on the Victorian mind. In the said definition Lyell brings both the 'organic and inorganic kingdoms of nature' under the purview of geology. Even before Lyell, James Hutton in *Theory of Earth* (1795) explored how our planet predates the existence of the human species. Hutton developed the concept of deep time to explicate that the earth was born way before we came into existence and will be there after we are gone. The concept of deep time has been further developed by Sigfried Zielinski in the field of media archaeology. Parikka uses concepts from Zielinski's *Deep Time of the Media* (2006) 'to understand that the interactions between media, art, and science have long roots' (8). He further uses Manuel Delanda's 'proposition of thousands of years of nonlinear history and expand to a geology of media art history' (8).

This is the third and final text in Parikka's media ecology trilogy that begun with *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses* (2007), followed by *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology* (2010). The general focus of Parikka in this trilogy is on the relationship between living beings, inorganic materiality, energy, technology, and what he calls 'medianature', a 'concept that crystallizes the "double bind" of media and nature as co-constituting spheres' (14). One aspect of Parikka's exploration is based on the huge e-waste that is created by the media discarded by us. Though we may think that our digital machines are spotless and may well last a lifetime but they don't. They don't die either but stay on in the form of what Parikka calls 'Zombie Media'. Parikka has a way with examples, which

range from various fields of art and history. He cites Trevor Paglen's installation work *The Last Pictures* to exemplify how discarded media stays on in a zombified way.

Another aspect of this enquiry is focused on the human resource that is used in the production of digital media. While using our plush iPhones we easily disregard the number of human hands engaged in making its parts and the degree of danger they are exposed to because of continuously working closely with harmful metals. This book is part of the larger ambit of the Anthropocene discourse. In an essay published as a preamble to *A Geology of Media* Parikka talks about the obscenity underlying the Anthropocene, which he claims to be 'self-explanatory when one starts to consider the unsustainable, politically dubious, and ethically suspicious practices that maintain technological culture and its corporate networks' (6).

A Geology of Media is divided in five chapters, an afterword, and an appendix, co-written with artist Garnet Hertz. In the first chapter Parikka talks about the methodological premise and lays down the grounds of media and culture. The second chapter is concerned with the deep time of the media; how 'history conflates with earth history' (35). The three subsequent chapters are focused on three major areas; strategies of psychogeophysics, dust as a multivalent phenomenon, the fossils generated by the sites of technology. In the appendix Parikka addresses the issue of the zombification of media. He cites various well-known names like Kittler, Foucault, Zielinski, Kahn, and Jay Gould in support of his arguments.

A Geology of Media, with the variegated examples from art and history, is a well-written book and presents well the writer's arguments. Anthropocene is a major discourse, which must be examined from different perspectives. Parikka's book on media archaeology is a welcome contribution to this relevant area of study.

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Born Translated

Rebecca L Walkowitz

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023, USA.
www.cup.columbia.edu. 2015. \$40.
336 pp. HB. ISBN 9780231165945.

Five chapters. One traductologically loaded prologue. One intriguingly curious title. That is what Rebecca L Walkowitz's book comes across as to one who flips through the pages at first glance.

As one delves deeper, the book seems to expand its horizon like a stretch of road that grows wider, clearer, and less obscure as one traverses down it.

Walkowitz works as associate professor and director of graduate studies in the department of English and is also an affiliate faculty member in the comparative literature program at Rutgers University. Apart from that, she is the president of the Modernist Studies Association. And she has written a book that promises newer vistas in transnational approaches to translatology.

In her book, Walkowitz argues the point that just as some novels are born original and then get translated into various languages after they come of age and after the debate on their translatability gets clinched, some books are born translated—as in the expression 'born bad'—often seeing the light of day in languages that are different from the original.

Walkowitz thus turns the linear direction of the narratological journey on its head. Normally, a book is 'born native'—to use her jargon—and then is translated toward the status of world literature. But, Walkowitz argues that with some works, it is the other way round. They are 'born translated' and it is only later that the readers get to know the original.

Walkowitz makes herself clear in the prologue—thereby clearing away doubts of obscurantism about her perspective. And in threshing out her point, she brings up references to Junot Diaz, Mohsin Hamid, Jamaica Kincaid, et al. Walkowitz emphasises on the polyvocality born out of these authors having their works released in multiple languages simultaneously. This, curiously enough, provides *ex cathedra* authenticity

to the translations just as much as to the 'native-language' version. And when it comes to authors like J M Coetzee, Walkowitz points out that his novel *Childhood of Jesus* got translated into Dutch even before the English original got through the press. Soon enough, between February and December 2013, it went on to get translated into nine languages, including Chinese, Polish, and two versions of Portuguese. Walkowitz—especially in her fourth chapter, titled 'This is Not Your Language'—thus subverts the geopolitics of language by lending as much authenticity to the target language as the source.

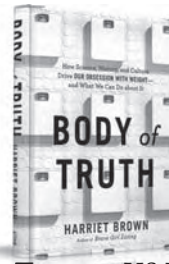
This often inevitably ends up in a confusion of sorts as the novel becomes inaccessible and inexplicable to people not well versed either in the native source language or the target language. Again, as Walkowitz points out, being born translated often necessitates authors to design their books around structure and narrative architecture rather than around language and syntactic pyrotechnics. She cites authors like Kazuo Ishiguro, David Mitchell, Ben Lerner, and Jamaica Kincaid in clinching her point.

Walkowitz's idea might just spark off some amount of caustic criticism among the postcolonial critics, with whom this 'English-as-translation-language' idea may not go down well as they would chance to counter Walkowitz's theory with the contrapuntal argument that a work that is of literary value and authenticity should be averse to translation, and not malleable to the strictures of translation.

However, in an era when the Man Booker International Prize, too, is recognising not just authors but also the translators, Walkowitz's book addresses a few very logical questions that problematise the spatialisation of literature in a broader matrix of world literature, so much so that a book by an author ceases to have a sequestered individual identity anymore and merges into the gamut of all its translated versions as part of a variegated collage that ends up in a melange of cultural agglomeration.

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Body of Truth

Harriet Brown

Da Capo Press, Boston, Market Place Center, 53 State Street, Boston, MA 02109, USA. Website: www.dacapo-press.com. 2015. \$25.99. 273 pp. HB. ISBN 9780738217697.

In 2002 US President George W Bush declared the 'war on obesity' as more than 20 per cent of population was believed to be obese and according to the WHO, 'worldwide prevalence of obesity nearly doubled between 1980 and 2008'. Also for last couple of decades there is a universal collective psychological build-up which dictates that 'fat' is unhealthy and 'thin' is healthy and beautiful. In Western societies, especially in the US, this attitude, pushed by aggressive advertising and medical profession, has assumed epidemic proportions. Against this background, award-winning journalist Harriet Brown—based on extensive research and personal experience—presents a totally divergent, objective, and welcome view of this problem and thus helps us take a balanced and relaxed view about our bodies and health.

First chapter starts with the basic definition of health and the relation between body-weight and health. Citing various researches and interviews, the author points out the major difference between 'correlation' and 'causation'; accepting a correlation mentioned in any scientific study as 'causation' leads to formation of wrong ideas. Carefully pursuing various 'studies' and 'researches' and especially highlighting that 'statistics are often used to describe complex, multidimensional phenomenon, and they can approach those descriptions from all sorts of perspectives'(18), the author systematically nails four big lies, which many have accepted as absolute truths! First is the notion that 'Americans are getting fatter and fatter'; next 'Obesity can take a decade or more off your life', then 'Being fat causes heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and other serious illnesses', and the last 'Dieting makes us thinner and healthier'. The last one leads us to the second chapter where dieting is discussed in detail; dieting—far from being beneficial to our health—can prove harmful due to 'binge eating' and the like and in most cases it does not make us thinner in the long run. Guided by wrong understanding and under

the pressure of mainstream media, doctors, peers, and others, many parents impose dieting on their kids. Another damaging factor overlooked by many is 'yo-yo dieting', also known as weight-cycling.

In the next chapter relationship between food and weight-gain is analysed; this relationship is not straightforward and simple as is generally assumed but depends on factors like thyroids, bacterial colonies in intestines, dieting, parent weight, genetic makeup, and also importantly on the 'pleasure' derived during eating! Our whole metabolism gears up when we enjoy our meal properly; this helps greatly in digestion and assimilation of the food. In a culture where many factors reinforce disordered eating and create 'good food-bad food' fixation, it takes time to get rid of them and start enjoying eating. One major factor that reinforces disordered eating is 'medicalisation of obesity'. This opens up the next chapter, 'Money, Motivation, and Medical Machine' that shows how over the last fifty years doctors and pharmaceutical companies have systematically created and reinforced the notion that obesity is dangerous to health and only specialised doctors can treat it with surgery and/or drugs. Also observed is the increasing and widespread bias among doctors and medical staff towards 'fat' patients. Next, fifth chapter discusses how our notion of beauty has changed over a period and how continuous bombardment of advertising through movies, television, billboards, internet, social media, and so on creates an unattainable body-image and the false paradigm, 'thin is healthy and beautiful while fat is ugly, lazy, unhealthy'; this keeps us perpetually unhappy about our body.

The last two chapters describe how we can personally as well as collectively bring about a positive change in this entrenched mindset. It depends on our own image and identity perceived by us in the surrounding world. In the US many women define themselves in terms of 'body anxiety' and 'social roles'—an outcome of social fear of rejection—leading to increase in 'fat-prejudice' at homes, workplaces, and social gatherings. 'Fat or thin, the entire American population has internalised this idea about fat being terrible ... they're overexercising and undereating and living in a constant state of fear and panic about this horrible, hateful thing ... So if they allow someone else to say "It's OK to be fat

and you should stop being mean to fat people", their entire life of self-torture is a waste' (165). Personally we should devise positive, real-world strategies for healthy life like taking fruits and vegetables, enough sleep, and physical activities, and on the collective side there are already some positive efforts in the form of associations like NAAFA, and HAES and models like Ellyn Satter's 'competent eating' and Evelyn Tribole's 'intuitive eating'. Also, the social media can be used to boost these efforts.

This wonderful book is interspersed with real life stories of people who have struggled with all the issues relevant here; these stories are highlighted in appropriate chapters which, apart from buttressing the point under discussion also gives it an authentic feel. Extensive notes, selected bibliography, and a useful index are given at the end of the book. In all, the book is hard-hitting and a must read for every health conscious individual.

Mangesh Buwa
Nashik



Digital Culture and Religion in Asia

Sam Han and Kamaludeen
Mohamed Nasir

Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group
Ltd, 2 Park Square, Milton Park,
Abingdon, Oxford, OX14 4RN, UK.
www.routledge.com. 2015. 130 pp. HB.
£90.00. ISBN 9780415521857.

Sam Han and Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir have done an excellent job in interrogating the role of the Internet in bringing different faith communities together, connecting so many others who can find peace which major faith traditions bring to our lives. Before we proceed further, we should thank the authors for writing at a time when the ISIS is recruiting members through the Internet. Lone-wolf attacks are becoming more common; but these terrorists are not lone-wolves. They are brainwashed through the dark Web and, behind their lone-wolf attacks lie organised Internet handlers, trolls, and people who reject 'The plurality of the new religious landscape' and the cosmopolitanism of 'bricolage religiosity' (5). It is good to have these two sociologists studying the phenomenon of 'mixing and matching aspects of

religion with other aspects of culture that are, now more than ever, digital' (ibid.). It must be pointed out that both Han and Nasir aim to 'treat [faith] "communities"' as problematic and they successfully 'describe how "community" is articulated and constituted in the meeting of digital culture and religion' (13).

It is heartening to see that the first chapter, 'Digital Christianity in Korea' begins with the authors reviewing a blog maintained by someone called 'The Korean' who lives in the US. The authors rightly hone into the power of the New Media—now new only to those who do not understand the power of the Internet, New Media now is a misnomer—when they mention the 'cross-cultural role that he [the author] and his blog play' (15). Based on this blog's posts and the authors' understanding of the coexistence of Asia 'as the safeguard of martial arts, Confucian filial piety' with 'the hypermodern [trope of selected Asian] cities', the 'so-called Asian Tiger economies', they see religion 'as entangled in the discourse of modernity and globalisation' (17). If Han and Nasir had stopped at this observation, then their book would not have been worth reading. They go beyond the 1990s' formulation of religion 'as part of superstition and tradition ... relegated to the past ... Religion, in that framework, cannot be modern by definition' (17). In this chapter's sub-section titled 'Digital Korea' (20–2) we have them bring in the Korean equivalent to the global conglomerate, the 'chaebol' (21). It is the success of the chaebol economy that propelled a digital economy in South Korea. Without fast internet speeds and universal access to the Internet, unlike in India, the spread of religion, in this case mainly Evangelical Christianity would have been impossible since 'it is Korean church websites that reveal important features of Korean Christianity [which is pastor-centric]' (23). They are sociologists but the range of their scholarship make them not merely sociologists of religion but theologians too: '[The Internet] changes how God and the sacred are understood ... The sacred [being mediated through personal devices that can access the Internet] is reconstituted to the level of the personal ... Small groups reflect a faith rooted in feelings and sharing instead of

obedience ... The sacred then reveals itself not [merely] in holy texts but in life stories, in, we would argue, sociality itself' (27).

This brings to mind Ignatian Christian Life Communities so popular in Jesuit academic institutions in India. The pre-Internet religious community has now been reinvented online. Thus, we find that our two authors have become commentators on the praxis of lived religions across Asia—mirroring the Christian Life Communities which they do not mention in their otherwise magisterial work. Han and Nasir may distance themselves from being called theologians since their project is to make explicit 'the divide between the religious local ("credo") and the religious global ("dogma") in the current media landscape' (73). Both offer structuralist critiques of the interface between the digital and the (lived) religions of Asia, but through their repeated and accurate observations on religious worship and 'ritual participation' through a distance, that is online, (11), they enter into the domain of the *trace of God* (See Edward Baring and Peter E Gordon, *The Trace of God: Derrida and Religion* (New York: Fordham University, 2014)). They will not agree with this reviewer's understanding of faith communities and might even consider these faith communities as simulacra; yet through their meticulous study of every faith tradition to be found online, from Hinduism to Buddhism to practitioners of Falun Gong, they reconstruct faith communities which they want to ironically deconstruct.

Han and Nasir are so thorough that one would want to believe them that the Japanese are searching more for the occult online than their American counterparts (37); but this is a double-bind. Is not the occult part of the religious apparent in both the Semitic traditions as well as within the Asian religions? Further, how can Han and Nasir be certain of their statistics? Large samples; targeted-questionnaires and even meta-analyses cannot make explicit the experience of the holy. This is not the fault of Han and Nasir but the limitation of the empirical method so popular in the social sciences.

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MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.
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Hindu Spirituality and Virtue Politics

Vasanthi Srinivasan

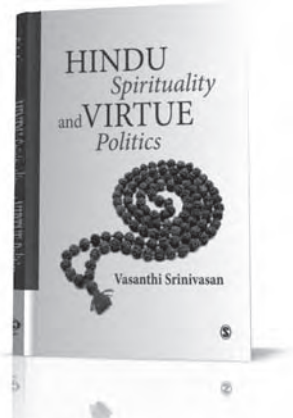
Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, B1/I-1, Mohan Co-operative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044, 2014. XX + 154 pp. ₹495. HB. ISBN 9788132113454.

MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT has long recognized that religion and spirituality can be a source of moral and civic virtues. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama are only the famous 20th-century figures who consciously tried to relate spirituality and politics in this sense. There were others such as Simone Weil and Martin Buber who relentlessly confronted the rigours of both spirituality and politics. Liberation theologians in Latin America drew upon Biblical doctrines to further social justice. However, the rise of fundamentalism everywhere has dampened theoretical enthusiasm in this regard. But this only deepens the need for philosophical analyses of different spiritual traditions with a view to clarifying whether some aspects of the same can vivify liberal politics.

In popular parlance, spirituality has come to mean a non-dogmatic, non-theistic and experiential approach to the divine and the trans-empirical sources of being. It is distinguished from religion which is seen as theocentric, dogmatic and exclusionary. J N Mohanty captures the spirit when he says that it involves an attunement to the sacredness of nature, life, humanity. Rabindranath Tagore, the visionary poet, portrays the spiritual as an orientation to that which is universal, immanent and holistic. In *Sadhana*, Tagore clarified that the essence of the spiritual

consisted in the realization of the infinite in our everyday experiences of love, action and beauty. More than the term religion, he uses the terms spirit and spiritual to interpret the great truths of the Upanishads. In this sense, many Indian thinkers use the idiom of spirituality to highlight the experiential verification and realization of some revealed truths. Religion, in contrast, was prone to being organized, routinized, ritualistic, and divisive. When we probe the form and content of the spiritual, we will see that the line between the spiritual and the religious is fuzzy in many thinkers' minds. And yet, Wilhelm Halbfass notes that the notion of spirituality has served as 'a vehicle of self-understanding, of assimilation and "Westernization", but also self-affirmation against the West'.

It may be objected that there is no exact equivalent for the term spiritual in Indian languages. Noting similar objections regarding both morality and religion, Bimal Krishna Matilal points out that 'one cannot argue that if a particular term was not used in a particular tradition, then the social or political reality denoted by the term would also not exist in that tradition'. He also suggests that the ubiquitous and enigmatic term dharma may be the nearest equivalent for morality. Sometimes, it may be used as an equivalent for religion as well. Margaret Chatterjee opines that the nearest equivalent



for spirituality would be sadhana as the path, but the goal of moksha or liberation dampens the transformative character of spirituality. Ananda Coomaraswamy points out that the Latin spiritus connotes breath as the life force in all beings and the spiritual pertains to the essence or innermost self of humans. In this sense, atman and *adhyatmika* would be the relevant terms for spiritus and spiritual respectively.

The search for exact equivalents presupposes that the term spiritual has an exact and fixed meaning in any one context. But this is not so; as Margaret Chatterjee points out, the term spiritual directs us to a 'cluster of concepts which net behavior, attitude, religious style and a lot more besides, all of which, however, center on the person and his world'. She also adds that the 'wide scatter of usages and analogous terminologies reflect a cross-cultural need to explore the trans-empirical ... one that embodies and points to goodness'. Many Indian thinkers use the idiom of spirituality for it allows them to be eclectic in selecting and emphasizing some aspects of religion while neglecting or even opposing others. They are critical about Hindu religion for its polytheism as well as caste hierarchy. They think ordinary religion was routinized, formal and external and did not have any impact on the larger world. But some ideas such as the sacredness of nature, immanence of the divine, disinterested action offer attractive starting points from which to craft a spiritual vision. The notion of spirituality allows room for individual autonomy and judgement in adapting religious doctrines and practices. It also enables an openness towards modern ideals of scientific progress, universal freedom and equality. Above all, I think that the idiom of spirituality conveys an abiding concern with transforming the world without letting go of the metaphysical quest for the grounds of being.

At a scholarly level, Hindu spirituality has

attracted attention for its diversity and depth in a range of disciplines. There do exist philosophical analyses of Vedanta and Bhagavad Gita ideas about pure consciousness or disinterested action. There are also many interpretations of the yogic paths to attaining spiritual peace. Within religious studies, devotional strands are often showcased to emphasize the subaltern aspects of Hindu spirituality. Indologists and Historians have particularly paid attention to myths and rituals of cosmogony or royal consecration and their inner contradictions (Romila Thapar, David Shulman, Jan Heesterman, Wendy Doniger, to name a few). Krishna Sivaraman, assembling two volumes on Hindu spirituality for the *World Spirituality* series, admits that because of its bewildering complexity, it must be viewed as a locus for a meeting of traditions than as a singular religious tradition.

And yet, at a political level, Hindu spirituality gets flattened out in political discourses, especially of the nationalist ideologues. In this context, it is used to bolster self-pride in the Hindus regarding their religious and cultural inheritance. More often than not, such appeals erase the complexity and inner tensions within Hindu spirituality. In the process, monistic Vedanta and Bhagavad Gita are upheld as the only authentic sources. These discourses also presuppose monolithic enemies, be they colonial or communal 'others'. Understandably, critical analyses of the orientalist, essentialist and apologetic aspects of modern Hindu discourses dominate in the social sciences. Genealogical studies are particularly popular with respect to figures such as Golwalkar and Savarkar. Partha Chatterjee has analysed these aspects in nationalist historiography adumbrated in Bengali school textbooks. Exploring Hindu religion as constructed by the disciples of Ramakrishna, Chatterjee also argues that it is a middle-class product, reflective of the fears and anxieties of an elite aspiring for hegemony.



REPORTS

Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Subodhanandaji Maharaj

Ranchi Morabadi Ashrama conducted a devotees' convention on 13 November 2016, which was attended by 175 devotees, and a youths' convention on 14 November in which about 400 students and teachers participated.

Values Education and Youth Programmes

Coimbatore Vidyalaya held a three-day residential youths' convention from 25 to 27 November in which 1,159 delegates participated.

Delhi centre conducted nine values education workshops in and around Delhi and Gwalior for school principals, teachers, students, and parents from 3 October to 9 November, which were attended by 917 people in all.

Haripad Math held four values education camps in November attended by 402 students.

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture held a) Youth conferences in West Bengal from April 2016 to March 2017: From January 2016 to December 2016, 209 youth conferences were organised along with 9 school-level youth conferences in 18 districts: Kolkata, South 24-Parganas, Howrah, Murshidabad, Nadia, North 24 Parganas, Uttar Sundarban, Hooghly, Purba-Medinipur, Paschim-Medinipur, Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, Purulia, Uttar-Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar. In all 37,861 youths participated and 42,690 copies of values education books published by the Institute were distributed free of cost. Also, 12 district level youth conferences were held during which cultural competitions of elocution, recitation, drawing, and music were organised and the prizes were awarded to



Youth Convention at Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture

the winners. b) 5 teachers' conferences were held in which altogether 984 teachers participated c) Central youth conference was organised on 13 November 2016. A total of 800 delegates and 300 observers from all over West Bengal participated. d) Vivekananda Anushilan classes are aimed at imparting moral, spiritual, and cultural values to the youths in accordance with the Indian ethos and the universal teachings of Swami Vivekananda. These classes were regularly conducted by the Institute among the youths of the age group 15–30 years. 42 classes were held; and a total of 2,679 youths attended the classes. e) To help unfocused students, the Institute is conducting academic counselling with the help of experienced psychiatrists since 2009. 54 new students got enrolled.

Swachhha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign)

Coimbatore Mission centre conducted two cleaning drives in November in which 82 students cleaned a few public places including a temple.

As a part of the third phase of Swachhha Mangaluru, **Mangaluru Ashrama** conducted 59 cleaning drives in and around Mangaluru on five Sundays between 30 October and 27 November in which about 5,000 volunteers participated.

News of Branch Centres

The doctors' quarters building at **Ramakrishna Saradashrama, Ponnampet** was inaugurated on 27 November.

The Middle School of **Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Vidyalaya, Chennai** received the Best School Award for the year 2014–15 from the Government of Tamil Nadu. The award was handed over on 28 June 2016. Two teachers of

Model Higher Secondary School for Girls and Girls' Higher Secondary School of Chennai Sarada Vidyalaya received Dr Radhakrishnan Best Teacher State Award on 5 September, the Teachers' Day.

Dr Lobsang Tsetim, an ophthalmologist at **Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar** received the Eye Health Heroes Award at the 10th General Assembly meeting of the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness held in Durban, South Africa on 30 October.

Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Mymensingh, Bangladesh celebrated its centenary by holding a symposium for students and youths on 11 November.

On 15 November, Mr Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum, Acting Prime Minister, Government of Fiji, visited **Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji**, as the chief guest of the annual awards ceremony of Swami Vivekananda College and inaugurated the new campus of Vivekananda Technical Centre at Nadi.

Relief

Cyclone Relief: Tamil Nadu: In the wake of the Cyclone Vardah which struck a major portion of coastal Tamil Nadu, **Kanchipuram** centre distributed 131 tarpaulins among an equal number of affected families in 7 villages of Kanchipuram district from 12 to 27 December.

Disturbance Relief: Bangladesh: Dhaka centre distributed 560 corrugated tin sheets to 70 families affected by social disturbance in Nasirnagar Upazilla in Brahmanberia district on 10 December.

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items to needy people: **Allahabad:** 1,061 shirts, 1,010 pants, and 931 T-shirts from 13 October to 18 December. **Bamunmura:** 139 saris, 490 shirts, 971 pants, and 460 tops from 22 September to 21 November. **Bhopal:** 1,217 shirts, 589 pants, and 800 pairs of socks from 29 November to 12 December. **Chapra:** 5,811 saris and 5,227

dhotis from 1 October to 14 November. **Ghatshila:** 989 saris, 940 dhotis, 265 lungis, and 421 children's garments from 4 October to 20 November. **Indore:** 250 shirts, 250 pants, and 60 saris on 27 November. **Jamtara:** 520 tops, 490 shirts, and 755 pants from 8 October to 12 November. **Kanpur:** 1,056 shirts, 1,016 pants, and 1,022 T-shirts from 6 to 16 October. **Lalgarh:** 2,015 shirts, 1,410 pants, 450 tops, 817 saris, 1,940 dhotis, and 104 bedsheets from 7 September to 20 December. **Malda:** 870 shirts, 1,200 pants, and 1083 tops in November and December. **Naora:** 2,900 shirts, 1,402 tops, 5,436 pants, and 1,500 pairs of socks from 18 November to 12 December. **Narottam Nagar:** 829 shirts, 1,392 pants, 563 tops, 348 pairs of socks, 210 toiletry kits, and 210 stationery sets from 27 November to 21 December. **Ponnampet:** 30 saris and 95 solar lanterns in November and December. **Purulia:** 500 saris, 3,128 shirts, and 3,509 pants from 29 September to 22 December. **Rahara:** 25 kg baby food, 194 saris, 147 chaddars, 14 lungis, 28 churidars, 283 bedsheets, 880 mosquito-nets, and a bicycle on 20 December. **Raipur:** 620 saris on 20 December. **Salem:** 3,152 shirts, 3,037 tops, 3,979 pants, and 991 frocks from 23 October to 3 December. **Sarisha:** 346 saris, 67 dhotis, and 25 children's garments from 3 October to 2 November. **Silchar:** 1 lakh halogen tablets and 300 mosquito-nets from 2 November to 13 December. **Tamluk:** 1,745 shirts, 2,865 pants, 805 tops, and 1,470 pairs of socks from 17 November to 8 December.

Flood Rehabilitation: Tamil Nadu: Chennai Students' Home handed over the Sister Nivedita Community Hall to the people of Thathaimanji village in Thiruvallur district on 20 December.

Economic Rehabilitation: The following centres distributed necessary items to poor and needy people: **Khetri:** 67 sewing machines on 20 December. **Rahara:** 8 sewing machines, 4 cycle-trolleys, and 2 cycle-rickshaws on 20 December. ❧

The best guide in life is strength.
In religion, as in all other matters,
discard everything that weakens
you, have nothing to do with it.
—Swami Vivekananda

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